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◈ THE TIDES OF MALVERN ◈

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THE TIDES OF MALVERN

By

FRANCIS GRISWOLD

—

"Lente, lente currite, noctis equi."

—

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To
MY MOTHER

◈ FOREWORD ◈

EXCEPT for several historical figures appearing incidentally in the earlier pages of this book, the characters are fictional and have no counterparts, so far as I know, in reality. There is no Malvern; no Gilbert Sheldon, no Martha, no Sarah; no Julia Sausser and no Jean Waring. But it must be confessed that the house is a composite of many old low-country houses, and that the people and the circumstances are composites of many actual people and circumstances. An attempt has here been made to tell the story of a South Carolina family. The indulgence of Charlestonians is invoked on the simple grounds of the author's love for their city.

For those who wish to refer to the Sheldon genealogy there is included at the end of this book the Sheldon family tree in so far as it relates to the main characters of this story.

◆ THE TIDES OF MALVERN ◆

PROLOGUE—SPRING, 1930

TO Caroline Nichols the day was flawless; not so much because it was radiant and full of spring as because of the simple fact that it was a day, and to Caroline all days were flawless. To be sure, petty annoyances did rear their ugly little heads occasionally, but she had learned that their effect could be as readily neutralized with a smile and a pinch of philosophy as acidosis, resulting from too much dinner-party, could be alkalized with milk of magnesia or a bit of plain baking soda.

Days, Caroline was thinking, had not always been flawless. There was that long haul before the war had made Frank rich, when they had been nothing—nothing. But what was the point, she asked herself as she settled herself more comfortably in the seat of the speeding car, of dwelling in the past? The good old days—nonsense! These were the good old days, right now. To think about the past, though, did set the present off by contrast; and with the days flowing so smoothly along one did have to jog oneself from time to time into an appreciation of what was going on, to nudge oneself into wakefulness against the lulling motion of contentment. In the not-so-good old days they had been nothing; now they were everything. This season had established beyond a doubt their suc-

cess in Aiken, and what smarter world could one con
quer? . . . It had not been nearly so difficult as in h
first nervous winter south she had imagined it w
going to be. She had supposed that she would hav
to take up riding and hunting, but it had develope
that with Frank and Connie and Jack in the saddle sh
had only to appear at regular intervals in a shabb
buggy with a mild nag at the other end of the rei
and a nigger boy perched uncomfortably but pictu
esquely somewhere behind. Frank and Connie a
Jack had done the rest: in the drag-hunts, on the po
field, at the horse show.

Caroline smiled to herself. There was no harm in
little self-congratulation now and then. After all, s
was the brains of the family. Frank, sitting up the
in his fine tweeds behind the wheel of his fine touri
car chatting with the fine son she had given hi
might be an executive genius in the business wor
but business was a means, not an end; in the high
sphere of good living she was the executive geni
She had guided the destiny of the Nichols family fr
the beginning and she had guided it with a clear
and a steady hand. In these days the country w
teeming with people who had made their pile; to h
separated oneself from this mob of barbarians, to h
made oneself within the decade since the war a me
ber of the exclusive company of the elect—that was
achievement. But now that her vision, her unerr
shrewdness and tact had won the goal, there must
no standing still; the Nichols must press on to n
horizons and new triumphs. And she was, at this v
moment, leading the way with a brilliant, a v
brilliant idea.

"What's so amusing, Carrie?" Connie asked her mother from the other end of the seat.

Mrs. Nichols gave her daughter's tanned hand a pat and laughed pleasantly. "I'm amused at your outfit, my dear."

"Well," Connie sighed, sprawling a little farther down in the seat, "it was too beastly much bother changing, and you were in such a sobbing rush. Besides, Jack kept his boots on, so why shouldn't I? Wake me up when we're there, pet."

Connie closed her eyes, and her mother turned back to her musings. The red clay road swept under the car, and the flat, freshly plowed cotton fields and the woods of long-leaf pine fled away monotonously on either side. Farm houses, most of them innocent of paint, broke the dull pattern now and again, and sometimes there was a flash of yard flowers. Mrs. Nichols considered calling the attention of the front seat to the jasmine and dogwood blossoms that were beginning to show in the woods, but she decided against it; they were having an animated discussion of yesterday's polo, and then too it was such a thankless favor to point out beauty to men. Let them talk. . . . The rushing air tossed their voices and laughter back to her in meaningless tatters. Connie was positively snoring. Caroline found herself nodding; too late bridge last night, she realized. Presently she was dozing. . . .

She was wakened by Jack's boisterous mirth:

"Hey, Pop, the back seat's passed out cold!"

She joined her quiet laughter to their uproar and looked about. The car was moving with slackened speed along the street of a sleepy village. The lavender of wistaria was everywhere.

"Oh, this is Summerville already," she told them. "We've made excellent time. This is the little place that's so famous for its lovely wistaria, Frank,—you've heard me speak of it. *Ex*quisite, isn't it?"

Frank grunted and braked the car to ease over a bad spot in the street.

"Speaking of wistaria," Jack said, "when do we eat?"

"We'll stop somewhere soon, dear," his mother told him.

A little way beyond Summerville they turned off into a side road and opened the hamper. When they had finished, lighted cigarettes, and stretched their legs, Caroline directed the burning of waste paper; then the car swung back into the highway, and the journey continued. The trees, Caroline pointed out, were beginning to be moss-draped; that was a sign that they were nearing the coast.

"What time did you wire the agent to meet us, Frank?" she leaned forward to ask her husband.

"Three o'clock. It's only a little after one now."

"I see. Well, that's splendid. We'll have time to stop at Magnolia Gardens on the way."

"Do we have to go sightseeing?" Jack complained, and Connie seconded with a groan. "I thought this airing was to buy a house."

Mrs. Nichols was expecting something of this sort. She was well versed in dealing with mutiny.

"There's no necessity, my dear," she replied sweetly, "for you and Constance to go in if you don't want to. I should think you *would* want to see the most beautiful old gardens in America, but that's for you to decide. You won't be coaxed."

It was not many minutes before the swift car came

to the old gateway of Magnolia Gardens. A grinning black boy, battered hat in hand, opened the gate with ceremony, and Jack threw him two quarters. Mr. Nichols bought tickets from the corpulent, asthmatic white man inside the gateway, and the car proceeded along the shady avenue of live-oaks draped with lacy cobwebs of gray moss. At the entrance to the gardens cars and busses were parked in patches of shade.

Connie changed her mind.

"Look here," she said to her mother, "I suppose I might just as well say that I've seen the sobbing place now that I'm here. Come along, monkey," she called to her brother.

Jack reclined in the car and pulled his hat down over his eyes.

"Don't catch me in that side-show, stupid. Too hot and fussy and too many trippers."

When Mr. and Mrs. Nichols and Connie emerged from the gardens half an hour later, Jack with languid amusement watched them coming toward the car. Mother, of course, was beaming; Father was wiping his face with a handkerchief and looking bored to death; Connie was loud as usual, as if her boots and habit were not attracting enough attention. She shouted out when she was yards from the car:

"Mother ran out of adjectives along with all the rest of the trippers."

"My dear," Mrs. Nichols said when she reached the car, "they're perfectly *ex*quisite this year."

"What's your adjective, Pop?" Jack smiled.

"It's all right if you like a lot of azaleas. Personally, I'd give all the azaleas on earth for one good shower."

As the car rolled back along the avenue and through

the gateway to the road, Mrs. Nichols read to her family from the descriptive folder of the gardens. When she had finished that, she gave them a little lecture on the country.

"This is the famous River Road we're on now," she told them in closing. "Oh, this is fascinating country! Think of all the historical events that actually took place around here, and the historical people who were once as alive and real as we are now. Can't you see the fine ladies with their satins and powdered hair and the elegant gentlemen with their swords and ruffles, moving along in their coaches under these same branches?"

"Mother's seeing things again," Connie sighed. "It's just as bad as abroad. You're so romantic, pet."

Laughter came back from the front seat, and Mrs. Nichols met it with her unfailing good-nature.

"I *am* romantic," she smiled. "Some one in the family must have a little imagination. Now, Frank, it's somewhere near here that we turn off, you know. A Georgian gateway, the agent's letter said."

The car, speeding along the sun-dappled road, came presently to a Georgian gateway, turned in, and purred through a long avenue of live-oaks and magnolias. At the end of the avenue the old house stood revealed.

PART ONE

◈ I ◈

AMONG that warrior band which Emerson crisply dubs "the twenty thousand thieves who came over th William the Conqueror" were Robert Fitz Hugh Shelldonne and his stalwart brother Guy. The es of these two are lost in the mists of the past, but may infer from the numerous lands and manors nted them by their grateful chief that they sweated d smote well as they followed the Pope's banner at stings. That their potency extended beyond the d of battle is fully evidenced by the long list of those o felt in their veins the fierce Norman blood of the thers. Through all the counties of England de- ndants sprang up, prospered or strove to prosper, d in the end passed on to their children the crimson itage.

n the cathedrals their monuments jostle those of gs. A Peter de Shelldonne was one of the barons o, taking up arms against John, forfeited his great tes to the crown; they were, however, restored to n by Henry III. Another Baron de Shelldonne nded and endowed an abbey in Northamptonshire, as the name of the abbey has faded with the years, vas probably one of those suppressed and absorbed

by Henry VIII. In the time of Bruce a de Shelldonn laid claim to the Scottish throne; he seems to hav abandoned his claim and to have retired precipitatel to a monastery south of the Tweed, where he divide his time between plotting and prayer. Among th chronicles of the family is the case of Henry de Shel donne, who turned over his barony of Mortmain t Edward I, whether from generosity or compulsion w in these distant days have no means of determinin

Through the vicissitudes of the Shelldonnes runs t.rbulent pride and a contempt for the buffets of fat matched only by a contempt for the laws of ortho raphy. They spurn the humble consistencies an pedantic trammels of lesser men and like Shakespear use in the same document two or three ways of mi spelling the same word. As for the spelling of the own name we cannot be sure that they are not makin sport of us. *Shelldonne, Sheldonne, Sheledonn, Shie down, Shieldon*—such is the masquerade throug which the name passed before it settled down sober to *Sheldon.*

But although the family name at last succumbed t stability, the family fortunes remained as open t abrupt chance and change, violent ups and downs, a ever.

During the Great Rebellion a large contingent c the Sheldons were staunch adherents of the Stuart and when that dynasty fell into temporary eclips Cavalier heads were at a premium. Many of the She dons, having no inclination to lower the price of hea by placing their own on the market, sought on foreig soil the safety denied at home; salvaging what the

ıld of their possessions they withdrew from the nult. Some found asylum in France; others braved Presbyterian threat and rode over the Scottish der to join Charles II; a few escaped to Spain; and : youth, after exhausting his resources on the royal se, took ship for the plantation that his father had him in the distant and fabulous West Indies. This s James Sheldon of Malvern Hall, Warwickshire.

◈ ◈ ◈

n Barbados James Sheldon found a bright, tropical nd set in a sea of amethyst and jade under a sky vast and piercing blue. The society of the thriving e colony seemed agreeable, the life pleasant, and climate delightfully soothing. The quantity and apness of slaves made it possible to have more vants and laborers than one would have dreamed n England. With a sigh of peace he settled down he management of his plantation and soon began orget the loss of the old country in the winning of new.

t first his young wife was tolerably happy on the nd. She apportioned her days satisfactorily between own home and the homes of her new friends. The let hibiscus and purple bougainvillea of her garden essed a strange beauty for her, and she thought she ıld never tire of the easy sway of her fine English :h along the palm-flanked roads. But as the ıths slipped softly away, she grew restless; she an to complain to her planter husband that the ıd was all very fine but there was such a thing as much of it. The plantation house, she reminded

him, was not particularly comfortable. In summer th endless heat, the mosquitoes and sand-flies, made th place well-nigh unbearable, and the land was so flat made her homesick for hills.

When he built her a beautiful little cottage on th highest point of the island with a splendid view of th sea, she shifted her complaints into other channe Here in Barbados it was impossible to maintain a ga den: there was either a storm or a drought. The se vants were numerous, but one wore oneself out tryin to train them; she was weary of looking at their laz black faces; she was weary of looking at her friend the same dull round. Were they never going back England, to London, where there were theaters, an people were gay and witty? When he explained her that the affairs of the plantation would preve their returning—even though it would be politica quite safe now—she waited impatiently a fortnight an questioned him again. When he finally told her th he did not know if they would ever return to Englan that she must accept this island as her home, she to alarm. She began to fear that she would never ag see the meadows and streams of her old home, th she was exiled forever to this world of glaring wh roads, burning sky, and interminable fields of sug cane.

This first murmur of restlessness moved with t years up the scale to the clamor of despair. Frequ childbirth gave her in exchange for her youth children that fever and strange pestilences stole fr her. With the loss of her complexion despair sett into chronic melancholy, and as she drifted into

wzy middle age, all her thoughts related to a con-
ning desire to escape—to England, to anywhere.
barque or frigate left the harbor but that she
ned it were carrying her away to a land of spring
autumn. . . . She hatched plans, conceived fan-
ic schemes of flight, which conscience and the in-
a of the years prevented her from putting into
ution.

t last release came from the skies to which she
her supplications. A great hurricane swept the
ibbean, and a few days later James Sheldon in-
ned his wife that they were leaving Barbados to
with Governor Yeamans for the new colony of
olina. From that day the unhappy woman ceased
lamenting. Carolina was not England, but reports
were good; she began to make wonderful pictures
er mind. She seemed to grow younger and went
it her packing with feverish joy. The day of sail-
came. She turned her back forever on the God-
aken island and almost forgave her husband for
he had suffered there.

would be pleasant to record that after her long
ish in the hell of Barbados she enjoyed at least
ng a period of bliss in the heaven of Carolina.
the fates that were so kind to her favorite heroines
istory were not so kind to her. The good lady had
ely time to set foot on the docks of Charles Town,
the streets, and turn round in her bewitching
home before she was seized with a mysterious
tude, which developed rapidly into a wasting fever.
hen they told her that there was scant hope (here
is lovely new world), she waved them from the

room with delirious protest. But when the fever h
had its way with her, she became infinitely submissiv
Hours before the end she shook hands with her hu
band and wished him well in this world and the ne
At candlelight she drew imperceptibly away like so
one tiptoeing out of a room.

◈ II ◈

N the early days of Carolina the forces of human disintegration were more rampant than they are in ır own comparatively safe and sane days. Then the ıost of death confronted men in a host of garbs and ıstled most of them off long before their time. Many those who bravely defied the sword and ball surndered with inglorious haste to that invisible foe—ver. As a result there were numerous widows in the lony and numerous orphans. Of the former one of e most desirable was a young and buxom Englishoman, by name Margaret Boone, whose captain husnd had deserted her for the majority by way of a al ague on shipboard in the Caribbean. To James eldon Margaret's laughing eyes seemed to deny the istence of melancholy, old age and death, or even the adows of such things. He found in her confident irit the cure for his despondency and in her hearty d domestic ways the promise of a home.

A few miles above Charles Town on the west bank the Ashley River Sheldon had secured from the rds Proprietors a four-thousand-acre grant of woodıds and here he cut a clearing in the ancient stand live-oak, pine, and magnolia and built of swamp press a pleasing little house, to which he brought argaret Boone as his second wife before his first was ld in her grave. No sentimentalist, James Sheldon ared with the majority of his contemporaries the mingly hard doctrine that the dead require no re-

spectful delays from the quick. Moreover, having left his children in the shining dust of Barbados and being aware of the increasing treachery of the years, he was eager for heirs to whom he might pass on the burden and privilege of the Sheldon blood.

In this matter the new Mrs. Sheldon was of ample assistance: during the four year period between 1711 and 1714 she bestowed upon her happy husband two sons and two daughters. James Sheldon went about developing his plantation as one in a dream. When he made long trading expeditions into the Indian Country and guided his horse for weeks along the winding, sun-patched trails of pine barren and forest he took with him in his heart his four children, passed them through the bewilderments of youth and brought them out into the clear sunlight of maturity, where the boys performed miracles in commerce and war and the girls married worthily and raised large families. But always he imagined them as his companions and they all moved together through a world of spring time and achievement. With his merchant partner and friend, Isaac Blakesley, a younger man who had come from Barbados and was also the father of two sons, James Sheldon would talk for hours, mapping out by contradiction and compromise a suitable future for their heirs. When, as frequently, the families exchanged visits,—the Blakesleys coming across to Magnavern, the Sheldon place, or the Sheldons crossing to the Blakesleys' new home on Goose Creek,—it was always the same: the fathers withdrew to a secluded corner and soon disposed of the topics of the day to make room for a subject dearer to their hearts than even politics and rice-planting. For the hundredth

time they retold each other what they planned for their children. It was a game they played with concealed but unflagging delight.

James Sheldon's great fear was that the same malignant hand that had snatched from him in Barbados his other children would steal away this second brood. It was against this paralyzing dread that he offered up prayer on those Sundays when the weather permitted the journey to St. Philip's in Charles Town. On these occasions he forebore steadfastly from dissipating the pressure of his one fierce supplication by asking any side-favors from Almighty God. Protection for his children was all that vitally mattered.

His wife smiled indulgently at his anxiety and vigilance, for she felt sure—and with apparent reason —that she had endowed her young with enough of her own gay energy to withstand any malady that might carry off the less robust young of her neighbors. As for her husband, he considered that she gave the children too little of her care. It particularly worried him to see them left complacently in charge of a black nurse while his wife occupied herself with the myriad duties of a plantation mistress. In Barbados he had found it difficult to reconcile himself to the sight of his own flesh and blood in the arms of negro girls, but his first wife's incapacity to properly look after her own and the difficulty of obtaining a reliable bondswoman had with the passing of time accustomed him to the arrangement. Now, however, he faced the return of the situation with a fresh repugnance. At first he resorted to a Scotch bondservant to assist his wife in her motherly duties, but the white girl's sullen carelessness drove him at length to such distraction that he disposed of

her one day with unfastidious suddenness and in the extremity of the moment (his wife was entering her fifth period of confinement) he entrusted the children to the care of Sheila, a strapping young African wet-nurse of recent purchase and unexpected intelligence. Sheila looked after her charges with a solicitude so intense and so tender that the father prepared with an easy mind for an absence of several weeks.

When his horse was saddled and ready at the door, James Sheldon remembered that he had forgotten to ask his wife something of importance. He went up to her room and stood in thoughtful silence by the chair where she was sewing. She waited for him to speak with amused patience, knowing his moods too well to ask him what was on his mind.

"Margaret," he said slowly, "if it happens that he arrives before I return, what name would you wish the boy to have?"

Margaret put her sewing down and looked up at her husband with twinkling eyes.

"The boy?" she said.

He smiled back at her. "You have promised me a boy."

Her hands lay motionless in her lap as she gazed out of the window at the sweeping curve of the river edged by the green and gold of the autumn marshes.

"Do you truly desire me to give the name, sir?"

He nodded expectantly.

"Then if it meet your favor, I think Gilbert is my choice."

"Gilbert. A good-sounding name for a boy. Gilbert. Gilbert." He repeated the name to the ceiling. "And whose name is that, Margaret?"

Her fingers were busy with the sewing again.

"An old name among my people and full of memories."

He looked at her for a moment absently. Then with an abrupt, "Gilbert it is, ma'm," he gave her a quick kiss and left the room.

A few minutes later he was trotting his horse along the sandy River Road murmuring the name of the boy to the gray beards of moss that draped the branches and swayed gently in the soft October air.

Grave news brought about James Sheldon's speedy return to Malvern. He flung the bridle of his lathered horse to the waiting hand of the stable-boy and hurried to his wife's bedside. She was resting from a period of travail, her face white and drawn in the dark mass of her hair. The mystic yellow light of late afternoon flooded the room.

When he had sent the old serving-woman away, he sat down on the edge of the bed and told Margaret with all the calmness that he could command that the surrounding Indian tribes were on the warpath. To the south the Yemassees, spurred by the Spanish, had fallen upon the settlements at Port Royal and Beaufort, and to the north the Tuscororas were carrying the bloody stick into the out-parishes. However, there was no cause for undue alarm: the militia would be called out, and there might be some bloody fighting before the tribes were brought to their senses; of course the trade in furs must inevitably be interrupted for months; but the situation would be reduced to order in a short time, and affairs would resume their normal course.

He failed to tell her of the straggling groups of

refugees already pouring into Charles Town from the frontier plantations with tales of incredible horrors on their white lips; but she saw what deep apprehension lay beneath the mask of coolness he was wearing. Her tired blue eyes searched his gray ones for the realities they sought to conceal, and at last she said:

"James, had we best go to Charles Town?"

"It may be necessary," he admitted.

"When?"

"At your earliest ease."

"In the morning?"

He nodded. "You are a woman of mettle, ma'm," he said shortly, taking her hand in his. "You will be ready to start down the river at dawn, then."

"I will, sir."

"Your servant, ma'm," he said and hurried from the room.

By dusk the great rice-flat had been loaded with most of the household goods and dispatched down the river with a dozen of the plantation's stoutest hands pulling with rhythmic strokes against the flowing tide. When the harvest moon had risen high enough, other hands were sent off along the River Road with the live-stock and vehicles,—a grotesque and clamorous procession moving off through the mottled moonlight. Only the house servants and a few field hands remained now and these were put to work preparing the longboat for the departure of the family at sunrise. By midnight the last arrangements had been made, and the servants, with the exception of Sheila and the old woman attending Mrs. Sheldon, were dismissed for a few hours' sleep.

After James Sheldon had barred the doors he walked restlessly through the empty lower rooms and at last drew off his boots and stretched out on a blanket before the dying fire in the kitchen. He could hear one of the children crying upstairs, the shuffle of Sheila's slippers, and fancied he could hear his wife's labored breathing in the room above. Fitfully he dozed. . . .

He was aware of a sudden sharp banging at the back door. Springing up, he strode to the end of the hall and drew back the bolts. In the moonlight he could make out the black features of Sammy, the house boy. His face was distorted with terror and his bare breast was smeared with blood from a gash in his shoulder.

His master pulled him into the hall and swung the door closed with his foot. The boy's jaws were locked and his eyes wild. Propped against the wall he could only point in the direction of the Quarter.

Sheldon climbed the stairs and burst into his wife's room. He shouted hoarse commands to the old woman by the bed, but despair gripped his throat when he realized that she could be of no help. He turned back to the hall. In the doorway stood Sheila.

"Quick!" he called to her. "Carry your mistress to the boat. I'll bring the children."

The woman on the bed felt herself being lifted by Sheila's strong arms. There was the flicker of candles, the darkness of the stairs and lower hall, and after that the moonlight. A confusion of agonies, muffled shouts crazily mixed with her own inner sobs; Sheila's panting breath and somewhere piercing, heart-stopping shrieks. An abrupt cessation of the jogging pain of

being carried, and the soft lapping of water against the side of the boat, incongruously soothing. Faintness. . . .

Tirelessly Sheila pulled at the heavy oars of the long-boat. A ghostly white silence hung over the river, broken only by the ripple of water and the regular dip of the oars. Sheila kept her eyes on the form of her mistress except when she glanced around from time to time to guide the course of the boat. Once she thought she saw in the gloom far astern the shapes of pursuing canoes, but a bend in the river hid them from view.

Presently she turned the prow of the boat into the shadows along the east bank at a point where there was no marsh-grass to prevent a landing. She carried ashore two quilts and spread them under the sheltering limbs of an old oak. Here she laid her mistress and knelt beside her to watch and wait. Now and then she peered up the river. Above the distant trees there was a ruddy glow in the quiet sky.

After a little time a thin cry rose above the low moans under the oak.

Sheila did what she could for her mistress before she carried the babe down to the dark waters. When she brought it back and placed it in her mistress's inert arms, she bent her head low to catch the words that the feeble lips whispered. The heavy eyelids closed and Sheila, when she had looked after the babe's wants and hushed its crying, sat looking at the sleeping woman until it occurred to her to go back to the water's edge for a clearer view of the river. Then she saw that the dim shapes she had imagined before were

w actually approaching. Plainly she could distinish in midstream three canoes.

She scrambled up the bank to the oak and roused r mistress. Margaret Sheldon's exhausted senses re slow to grasp the girl's frantic words; all at once understood and pointed toward the blackness of woods.

'Run, Sheila! Leave me, I tell you. Run!"

Sheila held the babe down to its mother for a last brace and obeyed. Heedless of the thick undersh that tore at her arms and legs and scratched her e she stumbled and ran through the dark woods, tching her little burden tightly. For hours she uggled on and paused for breath only when at dayak she came suddenly out on the Goose Creek Road. A considerable force of militia had been hastily istered in the neighborhood and it was a detachment these led by Isaac Blakesley that came upon the girl. e was sitting by the roadside giving the babe its akfast. Blakesley recognized his friend Sheldon's ve and after a futile attempt to wring from her a nected story sent her back with an escort to Faird, his plantation. Here, confronted by warmth and d and the formidable but sympathetic Mrs. Blakes, Sheila consented to surrender her charge.

'He Gilbert," she said simply between gulps of corn ad and bacon. And for the time being she would nothing more on the subject.

◈ III ◈

IN most respects Mrs. Blakesley made her husband a model wife. No plantation mistress in all the parishes from the Santee to the Edisto was quite her match in industry and art. No pewter was polished so brightly, no floors were scrubbed so frequently, no kitchen was managed with so admirable a blending of abundance and economy as hers. If there was a dinner to be prepared for some more than ordinary occasion—a visit from the Governor or any other figure of importance in the rising tide of the colony—the excellent woman performed inimitable feats with fish venison, wild turkey, and duck, against a background of everyday dishes cunningly exalted. Unlike many of her feminine acquaintances in country and town whose charm was limited to proficient housekeeping, Mrs. Blakesley was able to translate herself without loss of prestige from the pots and pans of the kitchen to the amenities of the living-room. Here her contributions to conversation, if not highly sophisticated nor ever invariably to the point, were often as piquant and per fect as one of her sauces.

And she worshiped her husband. A sign of appre ciation, however slight, from him was all the reward she sought for her wifely efforts. The truth was that she felt she could never repay Isaac Blakesley for the honor of being his wife. She retained undiminished her surprise that a man sprung from Kentish Royalist should stoop to mingle his proud blood with the

nble blood of Worcestershire Dissenters. She bore
h happy fortitude the trials of childbirth and the
ltiple cares of her household; and as a final con-
sion to gratitude she relinquished the Nonconform-
doctrines of her parents and each Sunday through
weathers accompanied her husband to St. James's,
new Goose Creek parish church, where in the
itewashed Blakesley pew she dutifully reconciled
lself to the Anglican approach to Life Everlasting.
I believe," she repeated to herself, "in God the
her almighty. . . . I believe in the Holy Ghost . . .
the life everlasting. Amen."

One blemish only Isaac Blakesley found in the
ttern of his marriage: his wife was altogether too
ilant, too solicitous a mother. From the steady
nd of plantation routine she was forever stealing
e to observe and supervise the activities of her three
s—Jack and Tom, the two that were her own, and
dark-haired, dark-eyed Gilbert, who was now hers
and whom she had come to love as deeply as if
had given him birth. "You can do what you
se," Isaac fretted to her, "with the two girls, but
s need more latitude, they can stand much letting
ne. Are you going to convert these three lads, of
om I expect so much, into milksops while I'm busy
own?"

s the boys approached adolescence, their mother's
d became increasingly obsessed with their welfare.
he kitchen, the dairy, the garden, the slave-quarters,
hurch, or on rare occasions in her chaise swaying
g the Path to Charles Town for a brief visit, she
constantly turning over in her mind schemes to
them from every trouble. "I hope . . . Oh, they

must never, never . . . I wonder if . . . Do you su
pose that . . . ? I must be careful . . . I must prote
them from . . ." Her friends found that she w
becoming a little wearisome. When they wished
discuss dressmaking, cures for the fevers, and th
vexations of breaking in naked-new black savages,
well as the latest bits of gossip, they resented an hab
ual tendency in Mrs. Blakesley to veer off to the subje
of her boys.

One day Isaac Blakesley on returning to Fairfie
from a stay in town summoned his wife to the livin
room, his invariable procedure when he had somethi
of importance to say to her.

"Mistress Blakesley," he began, scowling at the w
beyond her and pulling at the lobe of his ear, "I ha
made up my mind that the time is ripe, and past ri
for putting the boys to school."

She sank into a chair and sat looking up at him wi
panic-stricken eyes, her hands clasped in her lap. H
cleared his throat and went on.

"By selfishly keeping them tied to your apro
strings you injure rather than aid them. Coddlin
my dear woman, makes weaklings, and God ma
this world for the strong. You punish Gilbert
assaulting the Indian who brings us game, when y
should be rejoicing in the lad's spirit. You punish t
boys for their pirate fleet on the creek, for their sh
battles, for the bloody noses they exchange with t
pickaninnies, forgetting that strife is the law of l
and that the sooner they're initiated the better. Y
forbid them to ride and hunt. What folly! I m
save them from your petticoats. Moreover, ho
schooling can go only so far, and your commun

verness is fitted neither to teach nor control her ive charges."

He found that he was shouting what he had been nearsing over and over on the way from town. In more moderate tone he spoke of the schools in arles Town (such as they were), the fine schools in gland, careers, and the obligation he felt to give the t of educations not only to his own sons but to Gil- t Sheldon, whose guardian he was, and who must equipped to inherit Malvern Barony and a share in shipping firm.

She continued to regard him with wide dazed eyes. "Is it possible," he concluded with heat, "that you to see the logic of all this? Would you keep the s here under your wing when they should be learn- to fly? Have you never observed the wisdom of mother bird that projects her young from the t?"

She heard the voices of the boys in the hall and went close the door. Then she turned and confronted , as she had never done before, with the full force her will. He saw how intensely she was suffering l that, together with the easy-going mood that ays followed his outbursts, inclined him to listen. managed by the intensity of her emotion to infect with her own vague alarms at turning over boys uch tender and impressionable years to the shadowy not sinister influences of strangers. He began to ken, and later when he rode out to look over the ntation he was startled to realize that he had prom- his wife never to send the boys to distant England, not to send them to school in Charles Town for ther year. He hastened back to the house, sum-

moned her to the living-room again, informed her tha the boys would leave with him for town in th morning, and left before she could utter a word o protest.

Mrs. Blakesley had a good cry and dried her tear Her boys, she saw now, were slipping out of her hands it was her husband's wish and she accepted it with a little visible distress as possible. She had done wha she could to shield them from the world and woul continue to do so when they returned home at th vacation intervals. In the times between she coul send off frequent baskets of good things to them an have their clothes fetched from town to be darned an mended. That would help to fill the sudden empt ness.

And there were the two girls, Mrs. Blakesley though as she waved for the last time and saw in a mist th coach that was carrying her boys away turn the ber in the road. Mary and Eliza—she still had them. Sh hugged their heads to her breast and turned back the house with her arms round them. Girls, sh decided, were a great comfort; boys were so easy lose.

When Gilbert Sheldon began school, Charles Tow was a stirring little town clinging close to the ea waterfront of the swampy peninsular between th Ashley and the Cooper. Now that troubles with th Indians by land and the pirates by sea were well pa and the difficulties of Lords Proprietor rule exchang through a bloodless revolution for the advantages Crown rule, trade was brisk with England and th West Indies.

The three boys were soon at home in the boarding-
hool of the Reverend Mr. Whiting. The house was
asantly situated on the Bay, open to the water with
y the seawall in front. From the upstairs windows
was possible to refresh young eyes wearied by long
rs of the drab images of study; and it was great
to shy stones smuggled from the yard into the
rkling waters of the harbor, where lay an assort-
nt of seacraft fit to inspire in a boy's unfolding spirit
less longings. From one dormer window at the
k of the house it was possible to glimpse the
wded stalls of the Market, where one could buy
ff and gunpowder, stockings and corks, cattle and
ltry and slaves; and by crawling out of this window
climbing a little way up the tiled roof it was pos-
e to look down on a street where there was a tavern
where one could sometimes see Indians carrying
skets and furs.

Whenever a ship came in from the horizon and
ed slowly up to quiet moorings laden deep with
ar and fruit, molasses and rum, Gilbert felt his
t pound hard under the homespun of his jacket
he made himself secret and glorious promises.
ne day . . . When I get big . . ." Often the
rs brawled in the streets. At seven every evening
e was a clanging bell that Gilbert knew was a sig-
for them to go back on board their vessels, and if
resisted there was a patrol of citizens to round
nd expel them.

was exciting when ships from a place called New
land brought cargoes of slaves, and noisy auctions
e held in the Market; but the most exciting times
ll were when great English brigantines came with

their varied freight under clouds of sail. They brough
the hundreds of chests and barrels that went into th
wonderful warehouse of Sheldon & Blakesley, wher
his own father, who was now in the heaven which th
Reverend Mr. Whiting mentioned so frequently, onc
moved about as real and alive as Mr. Blakesley. Som
day, Gilbert dimly understood, he himself grown t
that infinitely desirable state called manhood woul
share in the wonderful activities of that warehous
and Malvern, the great plantation on the Ashley, woul
come into his hands and he would build a great hou
and events of great splendor would begin to tak
place. ". . . When I get big . . ."

But all this seemed to the boy Gilbert a dishearteni
way off, and sometimes when he looked at himse
undressed for bed, he doubted that any power w
capable of stretching and filling out his spare body
a stature worthy of the things that the future woul
bring. Then after the Reverend Mr. Whiting's spou
had bestowed her perfunctory and clammy good-nig
kiss and taken away the candle, the boy would l
sleepless thinking of the stories that Sheila had to
him of his lost family. In the end he would fall asle
dreaming of Malvern. It seemed to him that the hou
was already there waiting for him, waiting, waitin

He saw himself standing in the stern of a gra
periago, manned by a hundred slaves in cloth of scar
and gold like the liveries that the oarsmen of t
Governor's barge wore when he went out to meet so
important frigate. He himself, standing in the ste
looked a little like the Governor—with a gold sword
only taller and not puffy-looking. All the Blakesl
were in the periago: Mrs. Blakesley and Mr. Blakes

at in gold chairs even though it crowded things up n the stern; Mary was sitting on a gold cushion at is feet, smiling up at him; Jack and Tom and Eliza ad fishing-lines over the side. Every one looked leased and excited like Christmas morning or a irthday.

"Away!"

His voice sounded very loud and deep. The patroon ulled his woolly forelock, gave an order to his men, hundred oars dipped the blue water, and away the eriago went, up the winding Ashley to the great house Malvern.

Yes, the house was already there. He could see it. hen Mr. Blakesley took him along on trips to the arony, Gilbert was always astonished to find that the ouse was invisible. But when he returned to town d to dreams, the house appeared more vivid than er and stood there looking at him and waiting . . . aiting.

◈ IV ◈

TIME, which is notoriously unkind to those who wish to slacken their pace, is equally unkind to those who wish to quicken theirs. It seemed to Gilbert Sheldon that the years were in conspiracy against him and that the day would never come when he could look upon himself, and have others look upon him, as a man among men. But at last the placid force that was easing his foster parents toward the long shadows brought him out of the tangled forest of adolescence and stood him in the morning sunlight of a hilltop from which he beheld with clarified perceptions a glittering world. If it was not quite the world his boyhood had envisaged, if the distances were a little shortened and the colors a little less intense, if the points of emphasis fell where youth had least expected, it was no less a place of wonder and adventure than it had seemed in those earlier years. In a sense the wonder and adventure had increased, for there was so much more to do and see than youth had foreseen.

Fairfield with its mellowing house and gardens and its familiar faces, changed but somehow unchanged, remained his home; but the new and free activities of maturity were drawing him away. He was taking over from Mr. Blakesley active charge of Malvern, supervising himself now the work of the overseer and the drivers, familiarizing himself with the routine of rice-planting, inspecting the gangs of slaves, and exploring his woodlands. Trading journeys to the West

Indies took him away for months at a time, and there were frequent periods when he followed the old trails that his father had blazed into the up-country. In Jamaica and the ports of the Windward Isles he won a reputation for himself among the wives and daughters of prominent merchants as a young man of peculiar if somewhat elusive charm; the merchants soon discovered that his ready smile and engaging manner were not incompatible with a marked talent for buying and selling and one that profited to a high degree the firm of Sheldon & Blakesley.

"That young man will go far," they told one another.

Whenever Gilbert returned from his travels he went first to Malvern and then to Fairfield. Here he found the man and woman for whom he felt a filial devotion as strong as the aching love he bore the phantoms of his lost father and mother. And here were the brothers and sisters who had taken the place of those other ones that Sheila told of: Jack, lusty, impulsive, his time divided between the Sheldon & Blakesley warehouse and the company of friends as light-hearted as himself; Tom, lean and serious, who never took his nose out of his law-books, except when he indulged himself with a pensive hunting trip or the sober courtship of a neighboring justice's daughter; finally, Mary and Eliza, seventeen and sixteen, the former fair-haired and vivacious, the latter brown-eyed and quiet, but both apt pupils of their mother in the opening vistas of social and domestic art.

The Blakesleys went to town for February and March, when the social life of the colony was gayest with races and balls. Gilbert would often act as escort to Mary and Eliza, who were very proud of their tall,

gallant brother. Mary was soon taken altogether off his hands by a group of admirers that increased in enthusiasm and number with each ball she attended; but Eliza, far less sure of herself, was not always in demand and on occasions was obliged to fall back on Gilbert's popular arm to take her in to supper. This very much upset her, for she felt despite his reassuring banter that he must be chafing to be off in any one of the many directions where his glances fell and were returned invitingly.

"Gilbert, dear," she would say to him on such unfortunate occasions, "please don't bother about me. I can just as well go in with Mamma and Papa."

"Nonsense, honey," he would tell her. "Don't you suppose I know I've got the pick of the lot right here?"

Older men received Gilbert Sheldon as an equal. Around the punch-bowl they forgot their own oft-repeated drolleries and listened with relish to the anecdotes that he delivered with a wit and finesse that they considered rare from the tongue, generally callow and uncertain, of a young man. "That young man," they said, "will go far."

Young men, Gilbert's contemporaries, envied him his well-turned calves and copied with self-conscious assurance the manner of his dress. Young ladies felt their hearts flutter when they looked at him. Mothers considered him a most eligible young man and consumed much time and energy maneuvering in his direction their daughters, embellished and prompted from head to heel. They might have spared themselves their pains: the most brilliant and complicated stratagems met with little better than stalemate. It began to be suspected by some of the more completely

frustrated mothers that Gilbert Sheldon, for all his fine manners and attractive qualities, must be at bottom a cold-blooded wretch.

"You know," they confided in one another, "all this pother about young Sheldon is too comical. He's not at all the kind of husband I'd want for my daughter."

Wisely they turned their attention to lesser game.

Quite unaware of the discomfort he was causing in the ranks of Charles Town mothers and daughters, Gilbert went serenely and vigorously about his affairs. It was not until one day when he lay on his back resting after a long inspection of the spring rice-fields at Malvern that the first serious thought of marriage came to him suddenly out of the blue into which he was dreaming. He sat up with a start. He had spent time enough idly dreaming of the new house that he would some day build here on the grave-place of his family; the new house to which he would bring a wife and which would become the cradle of his children and his children's children; the house where the family stream, now narrowed to himself, would broaden again and look out upon the world through many eyes.

"I'm almost twenty-five," he told himself, "and that's a good marrying age for a man. I'm wealthy, and I don't think I'm altogether lacking in the qualifications of a good husband. Surely there must be some one . . . Some one . . . But what one? . . ."

In vain he passed in review the belles of Charles Town and examined their attributes. They were all somehow equally unexciting; they all vanished without leaving a trace.

But the abstract idea of marriage took firm root in

his thoughts. To soothe his agitation until it assumed a more tangible form Gilbert put gangs of slaves to work clearing the weed-grown, vine-covered site of the old house, terracing the grounds to the river's edge, and cutting out paths and gardens. His ardor grew as the work progressed. A gardener was imported, and at last when the wide lawns and gardens had been laid out and planted, he engaged the services of an architect who had come out from England to build several houses in Charles Town. Flat-boats brought loads of English ballast brick, and soon a small army of masons and carpenters were swarming the site of the new house. People passing by road or river were greeted with the ring of many hammers, the sound of saw and adze, the scrape of trowels, and shook their heads sagely. "What with the high price of materials and skilled labor," they said, "young Sheldon will wake up one of these days to find himself in the almshouse."

As to who the mistress of Malvern would be there was endless speculation over teacups and decanters. The Blakesleys were interrogated both subtly and candidly but without avail. They were suspected of undue reticence; in reality they were as much in the dark as the others, for although Gilbert often brought them from Fairfield to see the house in its progressive stages, he preserved a whimsical silence on the subject of marriage. Meanwhile rumors were born, flourished, languished, and died, and new rumors sprang up in their places.

"Have you heard," Mrs. Judge Pringle was inspired to remark in confidence to Mrs. Legare Philbrook, the

social town-crier, "that Gilbert Sheldon is quite daft on the younger Miss Izard?"

Mrs. Legare Philbrook was agog: she hadn't heard; she hadn't even suspected. Of course Mrs. Judge Pringle wanted it to go no further. Mrs. Philbrook hoped she would drop in her tracks if she ever breathed it to a soul. By afternoon the whole town knew that Gilbert Sheldon and the younger Miss Izard, with a plot of ten thousand pounds, were betrothed; by nightfall it was generally understood that the marriage would take place at St. James's on the fifteenth of the month; by morning it was being asserted, denied, and re-asserted that it was not the younger Miss Izard at all but the elder daughter of Judge and Mrs. Pringle.

At last the house at Malvern stood finished. Out of its many Georgian windows it looked down the new terraces that sloped gently to the curving river. Travelers by water—and scores of the curious came purposely from town to view the house—caught their breaths when a bend in the river disclosed the noble façade of pink brick, the great twin chimneys, and the double flight of marble steps that led up to the white pedimented doorway; travelers by land who ventured far enough along the entrance avenue to glimpse the western face of the house beheld another double flight of marble steps and a two-story portico with graceful white columns. Those few who were invited into the house noted particularly the wide marble-paved hall with its divided staircase; the blue-tinted panels of the living-room, the dining-room's paneling of palest green, and the carved over-mantels of both; and the long buff drawing-room on the second floor with its

two marble-faced fireplaces, its superbly carved cornices, and its broken-arch pediments over windows and doors.

There was not in all the parishes, it was agreed, a finer house than this nor a river-seat more beautiful than Malvern.

◈ V ◈

AUTUMN was roaming down the river, touching with gold and crimson the wooded banks and scattering with frosty breath the hazes of Indian summer. The shrill stinging monotone of the cicada was gone and the baffling country fever, and the air was quick again with the wings and the calls of migrating birds. The fresh winds that stirred the languid trees to boisterous life filled the sails of cloud ships.

Gilbert Sheldon, waiting for the stable-boy to bring his horse, wondered why the splendor of the November morning failed to elate him. What was this vague sense of unhappiness that had been his shadow since he had left Fairfield a few days before, that had been growing on him without making itself palpable? He could offer himself no explanation: a large rice crop was safely harvested, milled, and stored; affairs on the plantation and at the warehouse were running smoothly, prosperously; above all, here before him was the house, a dream become real.

True, there was the perplexing question of a mistress and furniture for the house. That, however, was merely a task of selection, bothersome now that the time to select had come, but by no means serious enough to account for the obscure depression that weighed on his heart. As a matter of fact he had about made up his mind what furniture to order and though he had not been able to fall in love with any of the young ladies, he intended to ask, some time

soon, for Laura Stedman's hand in marriage. She would make as good a wife and as good a mistress for Malvern as any of the others; she was comely, capable, and gentle. He sighed heavily and dug the toe of his boot into the gravel of the drive.

When the boy came with the horse, Gilbert turned his back on the house and rode down the sun-speckled avenue of live-oaks that his father had planted a quarter of a century ago. At the gateway he wheeled his mount and took a long look back. On the River Road he hummed softly to himself for a while, flicking the overhanging moss with his crop. But presently he was silent, and an expression of brooding returned to his eyes. In time he became so lost in the dark mazes of his thoughts that he turned off the road for the Williamses' coach only when the horses were almost on top of him. The coach stopped with a jerk and a jangle, and the Hon. Henry Williams's bald head with its wig over one ear appeared at the window.

"Gad, Sheldon," he growled good-naturedly, "having the finest house in the province don't entitle you to hog the public road, sir."

Gilbert raised his hat with an embarrassed smile and bowed to his Honor.

"Your humble pardon, sir. And my deepest apologies to Mistress Williams."

Mrs. Williams's bird-like face appeared beside her husband's with her dust-veil lifted.

"Greetings, neighbor," she chirped. "One who did not know you for a confirmed bachelor might suppose from your air of abstraction that you were in love."

Twittering laughter seemed to close her eyes, but she

was observing through their lashes the effect of her words on Gilbert's flushed face. She was emboldened to add shrilly, despite her husband's audible nudges: "For shame, Gilbert Sheldon, for keeping us so in the dark! It ain't decent. Too cute—but it don't fool a single one of your friends. Oh, we all know you're in love. And who she is."

Gilbert stammered a confusion of protests.

"'Her voice,'" Henry Williams intoned sadly, "'was ever soft, gentle, and low,—an excellent thing in woman.' Read your Shakespeare, Sheldon, and avoid women. Take an old man's advice."

He straightened his wig and sank back into the purple depths of the coach, easing his wife back with him. Mrs. Williams, unabashed, chirped good-by and waved her little gloved claw. Gilbert waved his hat and bowed stiffly, cursing himself for having nothing to say. As the coach resumed its muffled way along the ashy road, Henry Williams's voice called out:

"Come over for dinner to-morrow, young man,—I feel sure my wife will be going back to town."

Gilbert watched the coach till it passed out of sight at a bend in the road. Then he continued his journey with brows drawn into a frown.

It was past noon when he trotted up to the Ashley ferry. The tide was ebbing smoothly and swiftly and held an unruffled print of the sky. The dark whirlpools that the current made against the slow-moving ferry were more agreeable to his eyes than this vast blue peace; in them he saw reflected the turmoil within himself.

The misty golden shadows of late afternoon were

on the lawn as he rode into Fairfield. In the dining-room Gilbert found the candles already lighted and dessert being served. When he had exchanged greetings with the company, he took his place at the table and ate sparingly of the dishes that the servants brought, listening perfunctorily meanwhile to his neighbor, old Denis Cordeau, a well-to-do Huguenot planter from the Santee River country, who was holding forth—in broken English and with an indignation stimulated to the fuming point by the quantity of wine he had consumed—on the profligacy of the French court.

Gilbert's eyes glanced round the table. Besides the Blakesleys there were Amos Greenleaf, a young barrister, George Hilton, a boon companion of Jack Blakesley's, and Paul Cordeau, old Denis's son. Amos—gawky, booted—was no stranger: he was always sighing over from an adjoining plantation, ostensibly to hunt and talk horse with Jack and Tom, in reality to be near Mary, whom he courted by an intricate system of reticences. Nor was Hilton an infrequent visitor. On former occasions Gilbert had found their company pleasant enough, but this evening he felt a strange resentment: he wanted the family to himself; he wanted intimate, sympathetic talk.

Gilbert's eyes glanced at Paul Cordeau. Another suitor, he thought. Black hair and eyes, and in dress something of a fop—people called him handsome, but he had, after all, a mouth like a carp. . . . Old Denis was rattling away at Gilbert's elbow. Old Denis, Gilbert realized in a flash, had brought his foppish, carp-mouthed son to Fairfield to discuss with Isaac Blakesley—marriage.

The dining-room seemed to click and stiffen for an instant. Then the logs in the fireplace were crackling again, and the voices round him resumed their chatter. Gilbert found himself staring into the sucking flame of the nearest candle. Beyond the flame, Mary's smiling eyes. . . .

The servants were clearing the table and taking off the last of the cloths. Mary was getting up—Paul Cordeau at her chair, grimacing, bowing. Now she was gone, and Eliza and Mrs. Blakesley with her. The table was left to the men, and the madeira decanters were circulating. Gilbert tried to make himself talk, but the blood was pounding in his throat and at his temples, and his thoughts were throbbing and swirling. . . . Paul Cordeau's mouth seeking Mary's lips—the effrontery! Greenleaf and Hilton—more effrontery. . . . Paul Cordeau coming round from the other side of the table. Wine-flushed. His mincing voice: *"Monsieur,* it has been my desire *depuis longtemps* to have the honor to know you." The jackass. On and on. Then: "—to say the truth I hope this very night, *Monsieur,* to have the honor to ask for the hand of your sister." The unspeakable gall! . . .

When at last Gilbert was released from the torture of the dining-room and the men prepared to join the ladies, he drew Mr. Blakesley aside in the hall. The old man noted with surprise the tenseness of the young man's face.

"Are you ill, Gilbert?" he asked, placing a solicitous hand on the other's shoulder.

"I must speak with you about Mary," Gilbert blurted out. "She—did you know Cordeau intends asking for her hand?"

Isaac Blakesley smiled.

"I suspected it," he nodded and took a pinch of snuff. "A proper marriage, my son."

"But she cannot possibly marry him, sir."

"And why not?"

"Because I intend to—and it meet with your approval."

An expression of incredulous joy came into Isaac Blakesley's red face.

◈ VI ◈

GILBERT SHELDON and Mary Blakesley were married on the third day of April, 1739, and all of Charles Town came to St. Philip's to see and to be seen, to make comments and to hear comments, in accordance with the classic custom of weddings. In the afternoon Gilbert took his bride up the Ashley to Malvern in a long plantation canoe manned by six slaves who sang in time to their dipping paddles. The first shadows of eventide were swallowing up the marshes when they rounded the last bend in the river and saw before them the house outlined against the flying fires of sunset, its windows gleaming with the light of many candles.

To Sheila, proudly waiting on the landing at the head of the house servants and plantation hands to welcome her master and mistress, the approaching canoe seemed by the sorcery of dusk to quiver and loom like a ghostly memory. Phantoms of that night of another spring long ago filled for a moment the half-light and made themselves more real than the voices singing over the water.

After supper Gilbert and Mary walked through the fragrant gardens under the diamond fire of the stars. They found for each other the Great Bear and the North Star, Orion and the Pleiades, Jupiter and the Hair of Cassiopea. Their voices were low as though they feared to break the rapturous spell in which they

hung enchanted. All nature was spring-wedded, and the scented night trembled with hidden choirs.

Later the orange-red ball of the moon rose, and they sat on the marble garden-seat at the edge of the upper terrace watching it in silent fascination, until the river of so many moods—now blue and sparkling, now gray and somber, now white-capped sea-green—was glistening silver, and the world was transfigured in a frail white glory.

As they walked back to the house and climbed the white steps to the white doorway, sounds of singing and rejoicing came to them from the Quarter, beyond the great trees to the south. In the hall with its decorations of evergreens and spring flowers Sheila was waiting for them. When she had brought them candles, she knelt and kissed the hem of Mary's skirt; and Gilbert's hand. They received with indulgent and affectionate smiles the jumble of felicitations and frank good-wishes, admonitions and God-blessings, that she had been saving to heap upon them when others were not present. When she had gone, they laughed softly over what she had said. After that their shadows stood fixed for a minute on the white walls of the still hall; then followed them toward the stairs.

◈ ◈ ◈

Mrs. Blakesley was pleased to return from the giddy wedding week in town to the quiet, steady ways of Fairfield. "I hope," she told her husband, "that the rest of our children will delay marriage indefinitely." She dreaded any further reductions in the family circle. At one swoop she had been despoiled of two of her brood, and there were maids who would be taking

Jack and Tom from her soon. She contemplated with ismay the prospect of being in the plight of a hen hat has lost all her young.

For a time Mrs. Blakesley feared that she might lose liza by a manner other than marriage. At the time f the wedding the girl was a forlorn shadow; her rown eyes had grown large and sad, and her cheeks ere pallid and hollow. People said that she was asting away with a variety of ailments. "Are you sure isn't phthisis?" "If *I* know anything, the child has lankers." "You say there's no rash?" "Perhaps it's omething new." But despite a general divergence in iagnoses there was a general agreement in suggested eatments—blood-letting, frequent and thorough. When Mrs. Blakesley's last-resort dosages of Jesuits' ark and sassafras failed, she yielded to the importuni- es of her friends and intrusted Eliza to the mercies Charles Town's most admired physician, who alter- ately applied to the veins of his patient a leech and scalpel. It was only after the worthy doctor had urried this method to its limit and drawn from the rl's heart all but the life-blood that he discovered a ysterious and hopeless obstinacy in her case and turned her to her mother.

As spring passed imperceptibly into summer, Mrs. lakesley perceived that the sick girl was beginning recover her strength and her spirits as mysteriously she had lost them. Convalescence was slow at first, it by the end of the summer, after a long visit with iends in the sea-island village of Beaufort, she seemed be her old self again. Only in her eyes and in her ughter there lingered faint traces of her unexplained alady.

Eliza doubted the completeness of her recovery and shrank from putting herself to the test; that autumn she resisted with every excuse the invitations and coaxings of Gilbert and Mary. But in the end she was obliged to give in. Late in November a note came from her sister begging her for a visit. The message was too urgent to be refused on any pretext; Eliza packed her traveling-boxes and accompanied her mother in the family coach to Malvern, where she was prepared to stay till the termination of her sister's confinement.

When Mrs. Blakesley had counseled and cautioned Mary in all details, many times over and with a matter-of-factness that screened the solicitude of a grandmother-to-be, and when she had run her fingers over the inconspicuous parts of furniture and otherwise satisfied herself that Sheila was functioning creditably as housekeeper, she departed for Fairfield. Eliza was alone with her sister and the man who had been her brother and was now, strangely, her brother-in-law; and at first she listened tremulously to the beatings of her heart, fearful of hearing the stirrings of that old pain. But the pain, she concluded, must be quite dead and the wound well healed. She found that she had regained the Gilbert and Mary of other times, and the days passed in the laughter and banter of their former companionship.

Eliza began to love Malvern and her room with its sleek new mahogany furniture, its pictured wallpaper, and the river vista from its windows. It seemed to her that she had never been so happy as she was now. When she was not sewing and chatting with her sister, she was out riding the crisp, bright December roads

with Gilbert, who had given up for the present his trading journeys and seldom went to town. At dinner-time there was a three-cornered feast of merriment, and sometimes the neighboring Williamses dropped in to enlarge the table and the good cheer.

Grenville Williams became a regular visitor. Eliza's brown eyes made him uncomfortable, and he came each day to attempt to discover why. By the middle of December he had only discovered that no pleasure could match the uncomfortable feeling those eyes gave him; and when the Blakesleys arrived from Fairfield to spend Christmas, they found at Eliza's heels a well-set-up and amiable young man who seemed to be unconscious of the passage of time and the existence of his own home.

Christmas week brought to Malvern enough plantation delicacies to ration a palace. When Mrs. Blakesley had acquainted herself with her daughter's condition and advised her husband that he might well expect a grandchild whose birthday would coincide with the Saviour's, she retired into conference with Sheila and was soon lost in the savory mists of the bake-house. Eliza and Grenville, Gilbert, Jack, and Tom spent the days before Christmas hunting deer and wild turkey, duck and partridge, while Isaac Blakesley stayed by the fireside with the *Charles Town Gazette,* in deference to a foot that exhibited gouty tendencies when confronted with a boot.

Christmas day passed in subdued but happy excitement. In the morning the men rode off to St. Andrew's parish church, where Gilbert played with his fingers and listened in an ecstasy of impatience for the

close of the service. He galloped home ahead of the others. There was no news, but Mrs. Blakesley, perfectly calm, told him that "dinner had best be advanced from four to two—less chances of interruption."

After the banquet of Christmas dinner Jack and Tom and their father went out to stroll along the garden paths. Gilbert and Eliza went down arm-in-arm to the river's edge. They sat under a wide-spreading old live-oak and wrapped their cloaks tight against the wind that made a little hurricane in the branches over their heads, tossed the hangings of gray moss, and set dead leaves scampering and tumbling round their feet. Eliza's hand sought Gilbert's. In silence they watched the flames of sunset burn themselves out and cool to ashes. Over the dark roof-line of the house there was a space of pale jade sky in which trembled the tiny splendor of the evening star.

That night Mary Sheldon fulfilled Mrs. Blakesley's predictions and gave birth to a son. But the child was born dead, and the mother died within the hour.

When they told Gilbert, who was waiting in the hall, he stood with staring eyes and parted lips, dazed, unable to move or speak.

◈ VII ◈

AT first Gilbert sought forgetfulness in hunting and riding. He hunted with a fierce concentration as if the hunted thing were not a deer nor a bird but his own despair; and when he rode it was always alone and at a killing pace as if he were trying to elude the ghost of bitter memories that pressed him. But these methods were the most transitory of opiates: scarcely had he returned to Malvern, given his horse to a groom, and climbed the steps to the front door when the great emptiness would come back with a shudder. This house, the fulfillment of his dreams, was now a place of disaster, of anguish. When the door swung open, his eyes shrank from the interior. His footsteps made a hollow, mocking clack on the paving of the hall.

Sheila—she alone of all the house-servants was allowed to approach him now—followed his distracted movements with sorrowful eyes. He would walk through the house unconsciously expecting to come upon Mary, her bright eyes and smile on the other side of a door, the rustle of her dress in the next room; sometimes he thought he heard her shining laughter, and once, at night, he felt the pressure of her lips on his. Early in the mornings he looked for her in the rose garden that she had made. . . .

"It's too sad," people were saying in Charles Town, "to see a young man with every prospect surrender so completely to grief."

Sad, and a little weak.

"So foolish, too," they said. "Why, there are dozens of girls—every bit as pretty and accomplished as Mary Blakesley—who would be only too glad to help him forget."

Gilbert had been avoiding even the Blakesleys. But one Saturday afternoon late in February, when already jasmine and red-bud and the first tenuous mists of new leaves were beginning to stain the gray and green of the winter woods, solitude had dammed emotion to the breaking point and he took horse and fled from Malvern. At twilight he crossed the ferry and, because of the pitch blackness of the night, put up at the Quarter House. The next morning when he reached Fairfield, he found that the family had gone to church. Dread of neighborly sympathy had kept him from church since Christmas morning, but now he rode on to St. James's and joined the Blakesleys in the family pew. He bowed his head while the rector reminded his flock that the ways of God were ofttimes inscrutable to man but that all things worked for the best for them that loved Him. At that moment Gilbert was uncertain whether he loved Him or not. It was not that he doubted God's existence—surely there must be some Great Source from which all things flow,—but he did doubt God's love for man. "Just are the ways of God?" Inscrutable. Man was alone. . . .

On the way home from church Tom Blakesley spoke of Oglethorpe's expedition against St. Augustine.

"It will be a whirlwind of retaliation for all the Spanish-Indian outrages," he said with enthusiasm unusual for him. "It's every Carolinian's duty to join—whatever he may think of Oglethorpe and his Georgia jail-birds."

Jack rewarded his brother with a thump on the back.

"Noble words, m'lad. But you speak of our Georgia buffer in most ungrateful terms. I call it no duty but a privilege to serve with him. What a grand gambol it will be!"

He whistled a few bars from "The Spanish Dancer" and made his horse swing her rump.

"I'm out for Indian scalps primarily," Tom said. "I've always wanted some to go with the deer-heads in my room. And I can bring back one of those Spanish lace fans for—some one." As an afterthought he added: "She'll expect me to enlist."

Jack's hearty laughter shook him in his saddle, but interrupted itself abruptly when he turned to Gilbert. He said soberly:

"I'll enlist if you will, Gilbo."

Gilbert turned burning eyes on him.

"Are you ready to go to town in the morning?"

Jack grinned. "You bet your boots!"

Isaac Blakesley ahead in the coach with his wife and Eliza was muttering profanely with each sway of the vehicle. His gout had not improved since the return home of some casks of madeira that he had shipped round the world to mellow. In Mrs. Blakesley's thoughts were mingled the words of the morning hymn, a vision of the brandied peaches she would open for poor Gilbert, and a mild curiosity to know what the three on horseback were discussing so eagerly. Their voices came up from behind in blurred snatches that made her smile tenderly as she watched the early spring woods drift by.

When Oglethorpe's impressive expedition sailed from Savannah it included Gilbert and Jack and Tom,

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Framingham, Massachusetts

all proud possessors of commissions. Full spring was in the air, and full confidence. Isaac Blakesley assured his wife:

"They'll be home in time for rice-planting. It won't take over a fortnight. Mark my words. Lightning campaign."

But the campaign, as it turned out, met with unexpected obstacles. It was found difficult, it proved impossible to reduce the fortresses that guarded St. Augustine; promised reënforcements from the mother country failed to appear; cannons were lacking; and there were grave complications in regard to ammunition and supplies. The Don, summoned to surrender, replied saucily: "I shall be happy to kiss Your Excellency's hand—in my Castle." The lightning campaign developed into a weary siege. Weeks glided into months. Nothing seemed to happen; General Oglethorpe's magnificent expedition hung motionless in a lethargy of heat and vermin. By the end of summer retreat was inevitable.

Captain Gilbert Sheldon reached Charles Town overland with the remnants of his command on the last day of September. Jack and Tom were resting under palms back on a desolate, gull-haunted shore, both dead of the fever; and Gilbert himself was a ghost.

At Fairfield he discovered that Eliza had accepted the suit of Grenville Williams. "They will shake hands for life," Mrs. Blakesley sighed, "the week before Christmas." The lady's eyes were tired and misty these days. She was finding life a good deal more than she had reckoned for; and now the last of her brood was being taken from her.

◈ ◈ ◈

The months before St. Augustine had cauterized Gilbert's pain; his grief had spent itself. People found him, however, not quite the old Gilbert: he was a little more reserved, more serious than formerly. He threw himself into the work of the plantation and the shipping firm with complete absorption during the autumn, and when the winter season came with its gayety of dinners and balls, he began to look about him. If searching wistfully and earnestly he did not find any one to love, he did find quickly an admirable wife.

Laura Stedman was not the most beautiful of women, but she was—and this was everywhere conceded—unusually accomplished. Her mother being dead she kept house for her father and younger sisters and kept it well. Her generously distributed preserves were known to be of the most delicate flavor, her needlework was universally admired, her bearing in society was elegant; she spoke French and a little Italian, played agreeably on the harpsichord, and wrote a charming letter. She was, in short, a credit to her sex.

Her father, a distinguished lawyer and successful planter, alarmed that a daughter of his should reach the advanced and old-maidish age of twenty-three without marrying, had nervously let it be known that Laura's dowry would be a five-thousand-acre plantation on the Edisto River and a hundred slaves. That his choice bait should have brought no nibbles of the right sort perplexed and fretted the old gentleman into a state of chronic indigestion. He suspected his daughter of a conspiracy to preserve indefinitely her virginity; and in reality Laura did discourage all attentions. She had long ago set her dreams on Gilbert and had

resolved that if she could not have him, she wanted no one. Not that she had ever attempted to throw herself in his way; her worship had been largely from a distance, and she had in her memory many images of the man she loved walking, dancing, or riding with her more pushing rivals.

Then came the astounding moment when she stood listening to her father, who was saying in never-to-be-forgotten words:

"Laura, Gilbert Sheldon of Malvern Barony has—uh—done us the honor of—uh—asking your hand in marriage. I trust, my child, that you will give this due consideration and—uh—not refuse."

Refuse! Laura whispered, "Yes, sir," and groped her way up to her room.

As for her father, he was transported. His digestion mended over night, and his nerves returned to normal. To friends who had been estranged by his captious moods he sent conciliatory hampers of his best wines. The slaves at his plantation received out of a clear sky presents of clothing and sweets, and the rector of the parish was startled by an unaccountable increase in his living. He suspected, as did the other beneficiaries of his sudden bounty, that old man Stedman had taken leave of his senses.

◈ VIII ◈

AFTER his marriage to Laura, Gilbert entered a period of intense activity in country and town. Malvern and the Edisto plantation were cultivated to their fullest capacity and produced enormous crops of rice and indigo; the firm of Sheldon & Blakesley was the most flourishing in Charles Town and hence in the Carolinas. Gilbert's fortunes rode high on the swelling tide of the colony's prosperity.

By the year 1759 Gilbert had achieved his forty-fourth birthday, and there stood behind him a score of years that held a record of many things gained and many things lost. He had lost to a degree the physical and spiritual tautness, the inability to compromise, the aura of glamorous mystery that are all signs of youth. He had lost his foster parents, Mr. and Mrs. Blakesley. In a campaign against the Cherokees he had lost a segment of his left thigh, which a poisoned arrow had pierced and which had to be cut away; and in that bloody war he had lost also the necessity of preserving any longer the desire to avenge his family. These were the more important things that he had lost. It was true, moreover, that he had lost with the years a quantity of hair at either temple sufficient to cause him to exchange on formal occasions the comfort of powder for the perspiring elegance of a wig.

Gilbert had gained, besides wealth, rank. The campaign against the up-country Indians had raised him from captain to colonel in the militia and had brought

him distinction as an Indian fighter. Men who were ignorant of his family's fate and of the driving force of vengeance behind his saber marveled that a man so well-off in the world should be so careless of his life. He had gained, then, a prominence and a wide popularity that would have assured him a high office in the colonial government had he cared for it; but he contented himself with a quiet seat in the House of Assembly and with the political influence he could wield through his friends, from the Governor down. And so it was that the prophecies of the older men had come to pass.

Above all, the years had given to Gilbert two sons and a daughter. There had been other children, but these little flames the country fever had snuffed out. Mount Pleasant across the harbor had seemed to promise immunity from the rice-field pestilence, and when a summer cottage had been built there, Sheldon children had lived. Ralph, the eldest, was nine; Catherine seven; John, four. They adored the father who invented games for them and never came home from town without bringing them surprises; when their father told them that he was going to take them all off to England for their education, they knew that it would be wonderful. After Malvern had been closed, the plantation affairs left in the hands of agents, and the long voyage to Portsmouth completed, the boys found themselves in Westminster. But it was not so wonderful as they had supposed: school was every day except Saints' days, when there was church and an appropriate exercise to prepare, and the hours of study were from seven in the morning to dark in the evening.

When Mr. and Mrs. Sheldon had placed Ralph and

ohn in Westminster and Catherine a fashionable Lon-
on boarding-school, they looked for a house to rent.
"Furnished houses," Laura wrote to her sister, "in the
espectable districts of the city are so scarce and prices
o high that I have been able to persuade Gilbert to
ake a house in the country. It is a charming place
n Surrey with a high-walled garden of larkspur, phlox,
nd lavender and all the other flowers that we have
anted for Malvern but which the burning summer
un prohibits. Nature in England is happy and robust
nd its mellowed beauty is free from the wistfulness
nd mystery that haunt our province."
She found herself released, with an abruptness some-
what vertiginous, from the burdens and responsibilities
f a plantation mistress. She wrote to her friends at
ome lengthy letters of description and information to
ll the sudden vacuum and to compensate for the
acation about which she felt guilty, for now she had
o crews of slaves to keep occupied, no frequent and
elaborate entertaining to do, no children to keep track
f. Letters alone could hardly fill the plethora of time;
ut there was the garden to dally in, clothes on which
o sew, relatives and a few new acquaintances with
whom to exchange visits, and—exceptional luxury—
pportunity for reading again. Then there were ex-
ursions to London for social calls, for shopping, or to
e plays performed in theaters that put to shame the
arn-like Charles Town playhouse with its naïve art
nd limited repertoire. But English acting was not
o Laura Sheldon's taste, the mad traffic congestion
f shopping streets bewildered her, and she was not at
ase in the sophisticated and fashionable circles into
which her husband penetrated. She began to make

excuses to avoid these trips to the city. The life of th Surrey countryside, with its occasional neighborly vis and its placid ways, was the natural level which sh sought, and she watched with growing disapproval th social whirl-dance into which Gilbert was allowin himself to be drawn. It caused her pangs of mortifica tion to see the man whose proper background was th wide expanses of a river plantation of the new worl lost in the dissipated and glittering drawing-rooms o the old. She longed to see him away from the card tables and in the saddle again, and she found hersel casting back her eyes toward the remote windows o Malvern. The thought of regaining Carolina recon ciled her to leaving behind in the care of her cousin the three children.

But Gilbert seemed in no hurry to quit England The year that he had planned to spend seeing the chil dren well settled was almost gone, and still he mad no sign of preparing for the return trip. He wa spending days at a time in the city now, for the driv to and from London he found increasingly tedious Frequently he took the stage to Bath.

Mrs. Delancey Horton had known Laura Sheldon since childhood. It was natural that when she cam to England to put her fatherless son in school sh should drive out to see the old friend who she learned was staying in Surrey.

Laura greeted her caller with mixed emotions. Thei friendship had been one of many bitternesses; more over, she disliked Mrs. Horton's present manner, which appeared affected and one with the general sycophancy of provincials in London—a wholesale aping of the

travagances of English women of fashion. But, on e other hand, Laura felt toward Mrs. Horton the raction of sojourners in foreign lands for one of their mpatriots; the woman would have a world of news m home.

Mrs. Horton had, in fact, a world of news from me, and she began to unburden herself the moment e had embraced Laura in the hall. Within the next ur the latest developments in all of the principal harles Town families were disposed of and the ound cleared for more important conversational ivities.

Tea was served on the lawn. It was a singing after- on in late summer with soft clouds trailing their adows over the beds of the garden and a light breeze ffling the plumes of the elms beyond the wall. The wers were in their glory; Mrs. Horton, between sips tea and nibbles of cake, was not able to admire them ough. There was a pause. It was almost time to rt back to the city.

With that exquisite faculty for torturing her fellows hich must have been born in Mrs. Horton so perfectly il it function, she began to disclose—at first by in- endo and finally by specific details—that Gilbert eldon was engaged in an affair with the youthful and torious Lady Stanhope of Bath. At Laura's fiery belief Mrs. Horton expressed herself as shocked. d *she* been so grossly deceived by her late husband hich of course could never have happened), *she* uld have been grateful for friendly information. As parting shot, Mrs. Horton professed herself aston- led that the white-lipped Laura, who stood facing r across the tea-table, could be so ingenuous as to

suppose that Gilbert Sheldon would ever be satisfi with one woman, particularly when that one woma was his second choice.

With this Mrs. Horton left the garden and passe with lifted eyebrows through the house to her coac She drove back to London with her mouth twisted int a smile of intense satisfaction, which even the nos thumbings and ribaldry of a band of roadside rag muffins failed to dislodge. She had been a disappointe admirer of Gilbert and she felt now that that old sco was settled.

It was several days before Gilbert returned hom The sound of the coach wheels on the gravel driv came to Laura upstairs. She went to the window an saw him coming along the brick walk toward th house. He caught sight of her and waved; there wa the familiar white flash of his smile. She turned t the mirror and mechanically tidied her hair.

They met in the hall, and when he had given her quick little hug and kiss and the customary words o greeting, he hurried on to change his dusty clothe without noticing the shadows under her eyes. But a supper he could not miss seeing that there was som thing wrong with her. When he pressed her to tel him what was the matter, she assured him that it wa nothing; the weather had been close, she reminde him, and she had not slept. That was all that sh could think of to tell him. It was as if she were de tached from herself and were watching herself driftin helplessly toward the crisis of a nightmare.

After supper they sat in the cool garden. Laura' fingers moved through the intricate patterns of he

nbroidery; Gilbert opened on his knees the journal at he had brought with him from London. When e light grew too dim for either sewing or reading, ey sat watching the wings of night darken the sky. rail stars came out, and there was the burnished fragent of a moon.

Presently Laura felt words stumbling to her lips.

"Gilbert. I have heard—about Mary Stanhope."

She waited in a tremor of hot and cold, glad that e could not see his eyes. When he made no answer, e forced herself to go on.

"Is it true?"

His voice came out of the gloom.

"Yes."

It was true. It was true. Now there was no longer e uncertainty that numbed pain. She tried to speak, it she could only moisten her lips and stare ahead to the suffocating darkness.

Gilbert had risen; the outline of his head and shoulers stood against the dim sky.

"Gilbert—"

She reached out to touch his sleeve.

"Gilbert, dear—"

She tried to rise. The stars were reeling streaks. She lt herself falling, falling. . . .

When she opened her eyes, she was lying in her bed. her nostrils was the pungent sting of aromatic salts. e realized that Gilbert was kneeling by the bed. His oice was low, soothing, tender.

"Laura, forgive me. It was madness. I have been eside myself. Forgive me."

She drew his head down to her breast.

◈ ◈ ◈

After they had gone for the last time to say farewell to the children, Laura and Gilbert took ship for Carolina.

Lady Mary Stanhope had relinquished Gilbert only after a vehement scene. As a matter of fact, she had formed for this tall, dark man from the wilds of America an attachment that transcended her original mercenary interest in him. She was reluctant to part with her Indian, and by a miracle of deception she was able to convince herself as well as her friends that she was dying of a broken heart. She was rescued from this extremity, however, by the appearance in Bath of a fat Bavarian prince, who appreciated superlatively the relationship of beauty and diamonds.

◈ IX ◈

DECKED in the motley of autumn, Malvern welcomed home its master and mistress. For a year the house had been dreaming. It had drowsily lifted its lids when Sheila had made her inspections of the rooms and when Eliza occasionally had come over to order the opening of all doors and windows for a thorough airing; but mostly it had slept, deaf to wind and rain, heedless of the progression of the seasons.

Now it was awakening from its slumbers. The house-zone, heart of the barony, was again the pulsing center of plantation life. Gilbert had donned his boots again, and Laura, her housekeeping mob-caps. The avenue of oaks from the River Road to the house heard once more the rumble of visiting coach wheels; and over the slow stream of the Ashley hung the dripping oars of the Sheldon longboat and the echoing blasts of the captain's trumpet.

But the home-coming was more for Malvern than an awakening: it was a celebration. The Quarter enjoyed a three-day festival, during which gifts were distributed and twelve months of weddings and christenings sanctioned by the master and mistress. The gardens received a variety of imported shrubs and flowers; at the foot of the gentle terraces, near the water's edge, a pair of butterfly-wing lakes were laid out, with a little round white-columned summer-house between. The woods rejoiced in the music of a new English hunting horn, and there was fresh blood for

the stables and kennels. The shelves of the basement wine-rooms were filled with new casks and demijohns.

For the house there was, first and foremost, a portrait by Reynolds of the three children, to be hung in the panel between the two fireplaces in the drawing-room on the second floor. The dining-room preened itself on a new dinner-table and serving-table from the cabinet shop of the modish Mr. Chippendale and on the innumerable pieces of a set of armorial porcelain, each with the Sheldon crest in red, blue, and gold. The butler, the coachman, and the footmen were rendered still more intolerable to the lower classes of the Quarter by the acquisition of liveries of plum color with trimmings of gold braid. Sheila's high dignity reached its apotheosis when she received from Gilbert's hand a wonderful watch, a possession which she had long considered the ultimate earthly reward. This was the crowning event of her three-score years. Now that she had no longer any white babies to mind and had lost the power to produce any progeny of her own—half the house servants and a dozen field hands were her children—and now that there was so little for her to do to pass the time in a world grown empty and dull, it was a comfort to be able to press to her ear the big watch or peer into its face with dimming eyes and note the ticking away of the minutes that separated her from glory.

◈ ◈ ◈

The years that followed Gilbert's and Laura's return were filled with the long, soft rhythms of peace. Time was lulling Malvern with the calm that preludes storm: clouds as yet invisible were forming just over the

rizon, and already the distant winds of strife were ir; but life at the barony moved as serenely as the hlit ebb and flow of the river tide. There was noth- g to break the even cycle of the months—planting d harvest, the season of hunting, February in town the races and balls, summer months at Mount easant.

When in November, 1765, Laura Sheldon shipped England the children's Christmas box, she concluded accompanying letter to Ralph and John with these es: . . . *The days here pass very pleasantly; indeed, might well be living in Paradise, were it not for Absence of our Children. Your Home longs for u in a way that I cannot tell you of in Words, and cannot endure to think that it must still be Several ars before we have you back. You will understand w we miss you only when you are some day parted m Children of your own. . . . You will not know ur old home. . . . Your Father and I were happy receive your last letter, but it would make us still re happy if you would write a little more often, ecially John. Both your handwritings have im- oved, we are glad to see. Your Father bids me Re- ind you to keep up in your Lessons and to remember at Success is won only by Work. . . .*

But the brief note of a year later carried to her sons e foreshadowings of sinister events.

Dear Ralph & John,

I have grave News for you. Your Father was set upon in Charles Town by the Mob that invaded Mr. Laurens's house in search of Stamps. They suspected your Father of knowing the Whereabouts of these

Stamps. He faced them like the courageous man he is and cowed the Curs. Your Father is no sympathizer with mob tactics, although he Holds that the Province should be allowed to tax herself and appoint her own Judiciary, rather than have foisted on her Officers appointed from England, most of whom are men of small ability and less Morals.

We hope and expect that the Stamp Act will be repealed. . . .

That you, my sons, may follow in your Father's Footsteps is the Prayer of

Your affectionate mother,

LAURA SHELDON.

It was her custom to take her writing materials to the drawing-room, where she could compose her letters to Ralph and John and to Catherine while she sat facing their portrait. It was like being able to talk to them. She realized vaguely that they must be growing up, but she always thought of them as they were in the frame, as they had been when she had last seen them.

It was not vouchsafed her to see them again. She was stricken with typhus in Charles Town and died with their names on her fever-seared lips.

She was spared the coming storm.

◈ X ◈

THE repeal of the Stamp Act brought to the colony a decade of deceptive sunshine. It was suddenly received by all how grave a tempest had threatened; they were overjoyed that it had passed over, that the air was once again clear and bright. Men's faith in their sovereign, in the British Constitution, and in one another was restored. Trade flourished as never before, and prosperity reached unprecedented heights.

These years were full of planting and building, of buying and selling, of marrying and giving in marriage. The *Charles Town Gazette* was crowded with notices of the arrivals and departures of ships, with merchants' heterogeneous lists, and with the announcements of nuptials. Material for political controversy and alarums was at this time so scarce that Mr. Timothy (né Timothée), editor of the *Gazette,* was compelled to invent a subject of excitement to fill columns and sustain circulation. It became Mr. Timothy's intention—he was conscious that his style was a blend of Cato and Mr. Addison—that the slave trade must be restricted. "Over the Colony's white population of forty thousand hangs the menace of eighty thousand blacks." Mr. Timothy did not so far depart from his reason as to question the moral right of the trade; his readers would not have known what he was talking about. He merely counseled restriction. It was enough to cause the doors of all right-thinking people to be closed to him. Obviously, the more slaves, the easier domestic life; and unrestricted flow of hands to

the plantations was, of course, essential. Mr. Timothy salved the chagrin of his social ostracism with the fact that his articles increased mightily his paper's popularity among the lower orders of the town.

The social life of Carolina revolved about the Charles Town house of the new governor and his bride, Lord and Lady Montagu, a gay young couple, whose philosophy of life was to maintain themselves in a constant state of entertaining and being entertained. They succeeded remarkably well at putting their philosophy into practice.

They began to be frequent visitors at Malvern. A week seldom passed without bringing them to the barony by road or river; they accepted literally Gilbert's invitation to make the place their country home. This was the case not so much because of the fine hunting and excellent hospitality of Malvern—other houses offered hunting as good and wines as old—as because of the rare charm of their host. They found Gilbert Sheldon cultured, unassuming, urbane in a world where the crudities of newly rich planters and merchants were widely evident. They admired his good taste in the furnishings of his house, in his dress, and in the choice of his friends. Above all they felt drawn to him by the intense power of attraction that he had always possessed and that seemed to increase rather than diminish, though he was now past middle life and the years were beginning to humble a little his erect frame.

Since Laura's death Malvern had been without a mistress. This situation had developed at length into a problem that—like all his problems—took Gilbert to Eliza. It had long been his custom to take his troubles

us through the woodlands between Malvern and the illiams plantation. He would first bandy a few rds with Grenville Williams (usually on the ather, for Grenville's drawling interest rarely ayed from that unexacting topic), and then he would k for Eliza. The window-seat where she kept her ving things was their favorite place of conference, d into this private corner Grenville's muddy boots, od-shot eyes, and double chins had the delicacy ver to trespass.

"And now, sir," Eliza would ask Gilbert with the le one-sided smile that was so peculiarly her own, here do you wish to be darned?" And she would e him a long quizzical look as she bit off the end her thread and picked up her needle.

He would cross his legs with a chuckle and begin to l her what was on his mind. She would listen and v, nodding from time to time, but saying nothing. hen he had finished, she would look up.

"Well, Gilbert, of course you'll do so-and-so."

At which point he would recross his legs and reply: "Yes. Under the circumstances that of course is the ly thing to do."

Then they would have a cordial or a dish of tea gether and exchange a lively tale or two; after which lbert would take his leave with a light and refreshed art. It was the regular formula for his calls.

But on this occasion Gilbert carried a question over Eliza that threatened to surprise and disrupt the mula. He tied his horse to the hitching-post and mbed slowly the steps to the front door, groping for conversational countersign for Grenville. But then remembered that Grenville was no longer there,

that the man had succumbed months ago to the stroke of apoplexy that had been so long imminent.

Eliza was sitting by the fire to-day; the bleak December wind and rain had driven her from her customary place at the window. When she had welcomed Gilbert and questioned him about a piece of business she had asked him to transact for her in town she sent for a rum toddy for him and returned to her work cutting scraps for a quilt.

"Liza," he began, "aren't you lonely here?"

She shook her head.

"I have visitors," she smiled. "Now and again I go to town. And in a few weeks Hugh and Dorothy will be home for the holidays."

"You need some one besides visitors and your children."

"I find them, together with my thoughts and duties, quite sufficient to keep me from getting lonely."

He got up to turn the logs in the fire.

"But who's going to look after your planting here and at Fairfield?" he asked.

She cut her eye at him.

"You doubt my ability to plant?"

"I doubt if it is a fit occupation for a woman. You should have a husband, Liza. Many a man would jump at the chance to wed you, if you would but give them the faintest hope."

Eliza put down her scissors with a sigh.

"One husband in a lifetime, Gilbert, is penance enough. Besides, no man wants a widow with two children."

Gilbert stared into the fire. She leaned forward to touch his knee.

You, sir, should be seeking a wife. They would ne flocking to you—all sizes and ages. It must be ely in that great house of yours."

I have frequent guests," he said absently. "Ralph l Catherine will be home from England soon. And n before very long."

You need some one besides guests and children. By by, how did your fine guests enjoy themselves yes- lay? Was Lord Montagu's turkey done to a turn? d did her ladyship find the trout delicate?"

The servants are never dependable. They're for- ing everything they ever knew."

It takes a woman to keep after them, sir. Malvern ds a mistress. Let me name over some candidates you."

he paused in her work and appeared to ponder. felt his hand over hers.

Liza."

he tried to resume her cutting. The colored scraps her lap were blurring.

Liza. Is it too late?"

he closed her eyes to hide the quick tears. She saw self as she had been long ago; and she saw the youth bert, dusty from the road, black-haired, eager-eyed. heard the echo of her old grief, far away; the faint exquisite music of memory.

Liza."

Do you need me?" she asked him.

Thus it was that Eliza became mistress of Malvern took her place at the head of Gilbert's table; and the house which she had seen built when she was irl was her home, and the man she had loved since

she could remember, who had been her sister's husband, was hers. She brought to her late marriage the wisdom that she had exchanged with time for the enchantments of youth; life had lost its power either to beguile or disillusion her, and her soul was at last her own. She had shed tears when Gilbert had come to her that day, but they were not for herself,—they were for the girl she had been, the girl to whom love had been such a vital thing. Love was no longer that. Love, perhaps, no longer existed. Gilbert had ceased to be a god; he was a comrade and a friend.

Life flowed smoothly on. Eliza had inherited from her mother the ability to manage servants and run a large establishment. Her capable fingers, cramped in the narrow limits of the Williams plantation house, had itched to be at work in the mansion at Malvern, and now that this desire was satisfied, she opened her régime with a housecleaning so uncompromising that Gilbert was compelled to take refuge in town for a fortnight. When she had finished, the house was immaculate; and it was maintained in this state. Paint was kept spotless, dust could find no resting place, no tarnish was allowed to dull the shine of brass and silver.

"Now, sir," she announced to Gilbert, "Malvern is prepared to receive guests at any time, in any numbers the more the merrier." She took her place at one end of the dinner-table, and this end matched in animation and wit her husband's end. She met the cosmopolitan and sophisticated Montagus on their own high ground, and they accepted her at once as their peer. Her curiosity and sympathetic disposition permitted her to listen without discomfort to guests who talked

but themselves—a faculty that won her wide popu-
ity; for those who were inclined to be taciturn she
d a fund of anecdotes as irresistible as Gilbert's.
She and Gilbert communicated in a key of banter
mind which lay complete understanding of each
ner.

◈ ◈ ◈

Ralph and Catherine came home from England in
e spring of 1773, and Malvern was the scene of fes-
ities that lasted for days. Years afterwards old
rvants told (with the fire of their original wonder
ll shining in their eyes) of the three great balls, the
rden party at which tea was poured by six ladies
sides Miss Eliza, Miss Catherine, and "Miss Charles,"
e Governor's wife, and finally the moonlight water
rnival, with strings of paper lanterns on boats and
shore and French fireworks that convulsed the
adows round the trees and turned the dim silver of
e river to multi-colored flame.

When the smoke of the celebration had cleared
way, people collected their thoughts on the subject of
alph and Catherine Sheldon. Those who had not
en invited to Malvern condemned the whole pro-
eding ("a vulgar display") and judged the brother
d sister accordingly. Those who had been invited
ere divided in their opinions. Some found Ralph
worthy in every respect to be the Sheldon heir."
ome held that while Gilbert's son was "unquestion-
bly handsome, polished, and engaging," still he lacked
his speech and in his eyes the steadfast sincerity of
is father. Others considered his manner "supercilious
nd slightly effeminate." He laughed too easily for
ome; and a few suspected him of being a menace to

maidenly virtue. None, however, denied that his seat on a horse was superb, and he was given credit for being an expert swordsman and shot.

About Catherine there was but little divergence of criticism. "She thinks entirely too much of herself." "Insufferable airs." "Her nose is too turned-up for beauty." "It's quite evident, my dear, that she considers herself too good for our provincial society." Wasn't she forever contrasting colonial manners and customs with English ones to the complete disparagement of the former? Carolina matrons shook their heads: "That's what comes," they said, "of sending children home to England to be educated." They told one another that they felt sorry for Gilbert Sheldon; he deserved more satisfactory children than these two. They hoped that John, the son still at college in England, would turn out better, though they confessed there was no particular foundation for such hope.

Gilbert, unaware that he was being pitied, moved in a dream. He had looked forward for so long to the home-coming of Ralph and Catherine that the reality of their presence left him a little dazed with happiness. But as the months stole by, he began to see his son and daughter through the eyes of his neighbors, and his happiness began to slip from him. He was forced to admit to himself that Ralph was vain and selfish and that his mind lacked depth, for all its surface brilliance. He was cruel to slaves and horses, inclined to be curt to his step-mother, and insulting to guests who did not share his prejudices. He showed no disposition to take up the practice of law, and—what most distressed Gilbert—he showed no interest in the life of the plantation and avoided so much as

visiting the warehouses of Sheldon & Blakesley. His time was spent with the fast element of the government set; soon even hunting at Malvern had been abandoned for the more congenial pursuits of the town.

One morning months after Ralph's return from England, Gilbert called him out after breakfast to walk through the gardens. He put his arm round his son's shoulders and talked as they walked.

"Son, it's a disappointment to me to see you take such little interest in this place. Some day it will be yours, and yet I doubt if you could name for me the trees and shrubs on these lawns."

Ralph smiled.

"I confess, sir, that my interest in shrubs is slight."

"It would be well if you cared more for shrubs and less for gaming, tippling, and such. But this holiday of yours must have an end, Ralph. No man can stand idleness. When do you intend entering the law? I have already spoken to Justice Rhett in your behalf. By delaying you handicap yourself while others forge ahead."

Ralph helped himself to snuff from an ivory box and closed the lid with an emphatic click.

"I have decided, sir," he said complacently, studying his nails, "not to enter the law."

His cold blue eyes met for a moment his father's dark, troubled ones and shifted away to the river.

"We may as well have this out now," he continued with a sigh. "I dislike disappointing you, naturally, but after all a man must follow his own bent, and mine is not the law. And don't ask me to go into trade, Father. I despise it. Nor have I any desire to become a country squire. I have about decided on the

army for my profession. Yes, I rather fancy the life."

Gilbert had paused and taken his arm from his son's shoulders. He stood silent for several minutes. When he spoke, his voice was very low.

"If you desire to throw away your preparations and opportunities in law, my son, I shall not make any attempt to interfere. If you are satisfied, I am."

"Good!" Ralph smiled.

They walked back toward the house. Ralph, his arm linked with his father's, was outlining the probable course of his career in the army. Gilbert's fingers were pulling apart the sprig of tea-olive that he had picked for Eliza.

It was she alone who saw the deep hurt he had suffered.

A few weeks later Gilbert was able to obtain for Ralph an appointment as aide to Lord Montagu. John Sheldon in England received the following letter from his father:

. . . Your brother has elected to enter the Army, and in consequence I deem it incumbent on you to equip yourself for the Law. You must also be prepared to take a hand in our shipping business and to learn the management of a plantation. Seabrook, your mother's plantation on the Edisto, will come to you. . . .

Apply yourself diligently to your studies; allow no frivolities to distract your mind from the path of Duty. You may take a trip to France during the summer vacation, but remind yourself frequently that you are traveling to observe and learn and not to dissipate. . . .

◆ XI ◆

AS the months went by, it became apparent that the storm which had passed over the colony was swinging back. Men were beginning to exhibit signs of vague unrest like animals at the approach of a hurricane. There were the reverberations of distant thunder from the other colonies.

Josiah Salter, a prominent Whig, who had come from Boston "for his health," found his diary was becoming crowded with interesting observations on the people and sights of this strange and foreign town whose temper he was testing.

"I am astonished at the Harbour, more crowded with ships than any in America, and at the Town with its fine residences, churches, and public buildings, in particular the new Exchange and the Library. . . . To the St. Cecilia concert. The music was the best I have ever heard, in particular the French horns and bass viol, to which I am very partial. Most of the performers were gentlemen amateurs. I was amazed at the richness of dress of both ladies and gentlemen, many of the latter with swords on. In taciturnity during the performance the ladies are before our ladies; in chatter and flirtation after, pretty much on a par. . . . Spent this day at the races, where I beheld 'Flimnap' beat 'Little David' and was initiated a little into the mysterious art of the turf. . . . To

Malvern, the country house of Mr. Gilbert Sheldon with a large company,—a most superb house said to have cost him £19,000 sterling. It was a farewell party given in honor of Lord and Lady Montagu, who are on the eve of their return to England after his recent resignation. My host personally conducted me over his grounds, and I was much interested in the number of unusual trees, etc.—evergreen oaks, some of great size with a gray moss that I suggested to my host would make excellent cattle fodder, magnolias, figs, pomegranates, oranges, and a number of flowering shrubs of which I do not recall the names. At dinner I sat on the left of my hostess, whose company would have been highly agreeable and instructive but for the presence across from me of Lord Montagu, whose continuous persiflage set my teeth on edge. The company was politically of all stripes, due, I judge, to Mr. Sheldon's desire to conciliate and bring together in friendly congress the warring factions. He is known as one of the most conservative of the patriotic party, but his intimacy with Lord Montagu, his son's scarlet uniform, and his daughter's known sentiments lead me to draw my own conclusions. Politics was talked to the evident distaste of my host and hostess and I had the mortification of having to hold my tongue while one gentleman, flaming with wine and Toryism, told the table that he distrusted utterly all the Northern states except Virginia and that if Carolina ever renounced her sovereign she would have governors sent her from

Massachusetts. I showed my contempt with a smile."

The shrewd and observant Mr. Salter could hardly have been expected to foresee that in the long shifting panorama of the years the Tory gentleman's absurd prophecy was to be fulfilled.

Shortly after the return of Mr. Salter to Boston, the revolutionists of Charles Town had a tea-party of their own. They broke open stored chests of the offending herb and, in the classical phrase of Mr. Timothy, "made oblation to Neptune." Mass-meetings began to be frequent; the leaders held secret conferences; high treason was everywhere. The Assembly opposed distracted acting-Governor Bull at every turn and when prorogued appointed a "Committee of Public Safety," recommended "the good people of these parts" to drill and learn the use of arms, and appointed "a day of fasting and prayer that the calamities of civil war might be averted." One night the King's armory was stripped of muskets and cutlasses and the powder magazines out of town raided. Soon Charles Town was beginning to present the appearance of an armed camp.

The winds of war were rising in earnest now. And yet when the fast-sailing brig *Industry* outstripped the express rider from Philadelphia by four days and brought the news of Lexington, there was an abrupt pause in the tumult, and men gazed at one another sheepishly as though they had been surprised digging graves on a spring morning. They had, as a matter of fact, been making warlike gestures without believing

in the least that war would come. They were like people who spoke of the certainty of death without believing that they themselves must die.

It was at this point that John Sheldon came home from England. Malvern received him quietly; the times were too grave for a festive welcome, and Gilbert was displeased with him for quitting college because of a crisis that would soon blow over. The father failed to perceive at first that the son was on fire with revolutionary ardor. This passion was temporarily eclipsed by the boy's joy at being home. He could hardly be coaxed out of his saddle to eat and sleep so eager was he to explore the plantations. He amused and delighted his father with a multitude of questions, and it was soon evident that in his interests and in his nature he was the antithesis of his brother.

For a week the brothers preserved a truce. But on the first Sunday after John's home-coming, the bitterness that smoldered between them burst into flame. It began on the way home from St. Andrew's. The harassed rector's equivocal sermon had been construed as hostile by all elements in the divided congregation of the little parish church; and after the service instead of the usual assembly, when each coach was the scene of a reception, people had drawn apart into furtive, whispering groups. Many unfriendly eyes had followed the departure from the clearing under the oaks of the Sheldon family.

Gilbert and Eliza, Catherine, and Dorothy, Eliza's daughter, were in the coach. Behind rode Ralph and Prentiss Hollifield, a brother officer and Catherine's latest beau. Their laughter and their words carried back to John and Hugh, Dorothy's young brother, who

brought up the rear. The day was gray; it had rained all night, and the autumn leaves were still dripping despondently. Soggy and drab they were no longer any match for the gay scarlet of the officers' uniforms.

Hugh's bright eyes were frowning as he leaned over to speak to John.

"They make sport of the cause, but they had best take care lest they be laughing out of the other corner of their mouths."

John gave a quick smile to this young step-brother for whom he felt a growing affection, but he also touched a silencing finger to his lips. Hugh nodded submissively; John had already become to him a hero. They rode on in silence.

Presently Ralph's voice, conceited, disdainful, interrupted their thoughts.

"I trust you observed, John, that some at least of the colonial clergy have not gone mad. An admirable sermon the Reverend Mr. Allen gave us. You remember he spoke of the silly clowns and vile mechanics who dare to censor governors and princes. Come, brother, it's high time you enlisted and helped punish the dogs lest you be mistaken for one of them. What say you to that, sir? Are you a traitor to your country and your king? Speak out!"

John flushed deeply, but he answered in an even voice.

"I plan to enlist."

"Bravo!" Ralph laughed. "I scarce expected such good sense. What think you, Prentiss? Gad! And now let us catechize the stripling. 'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings.'" He pulled in his horse until he was abreast of Hugh. "Suckling, how old are you?"

"Seventeen, sir."

"Ah!—quite the little man. Come in to the barracks next week, and I'll make a drummer-boy of you."

"I'm against the King."

"What's this?"

"I'm going to fight the tyrant King George."

The sarcastic smile left Ralph's face; he shifted his crop to his left hand and gripped Hugh's arm with his right.

"Puppy! Do you know what you're saying?"

His face was livid. He tightened his grip until Hugh winced and tore his arm away.

"Down with King George!" Hugh shouted. He put up his arm to ward off a blow from the heavy crop, but a second blow knocked off his hat, and a third cut his head and so dazed him that he almost slipped out of his saddle. John spurred his horse between his brother and Hugh and with a quick movement wrenched the crop from Ralph's hand.

"Give me that crop, you fool, and keep out of this!" Ralph snarled.

"I'll give it to you over the head, if you try to bully Hugh any more."

The brothers' eyes met. Ralph's capitulated.

"Give me that crop," he said sullenly. "I ought to thrash him, but I'll let him off this once. But he had best learn to hold his tongue. I warn him."

Ralph took the crop and galloped to catch up with Prentiss Hollifield, while John looked after Hugh.

Dinner was tense. Conversation—on however light and agreeable a matter—was inclined to veer into vexatious places: the innocuous topic of St. Cecilia

concerts led quickly to the uncertainty of the date when the next one could be held; gossip about a certain Charles Town belle who was preparing to marry gave rise to the thought that she would have to do without an imported trousseau and to the observation that her father, a prominent Loyalist, had been anonymously threatened with tar and feathers. Below the surface of talk that strained to be casual lay an explosive to which every subject of conversation was a fuse. It was necessary to keep snuffing out these fuses; this responsibility rested with Gilbert and Eliza. From their ends of the table they formed a restraining line between the two factions that sat facing each other: John, Dorothy, and Hugh on one side; Ralph, Catherine, and Prentiss Hollifield on the other.

But when dessert had been served, the candles lighted, and the ladies had withdrawn, it was no longer possible to avoid a break. Ralph said to Gilbert:

"There's a commission waiting for you in town, Father. We need men like you, sir, to show these rebel dogs their place."

Gilbert put down his glass and shook his head. It was a moment before he spoke.

"No," he said slowly. "There'll be no fighting, Ralph. The colonists will come to their senses, and the King's ministers, too. Anything else is unthinkable. Children do not engage in a death struggle with their mother because of a misunderstanding."

"But, sir," John broke in, "what if a mother seeks to starve and strangle her children? Does not the law of self-preservation oblige the children to defend themselves from so unnatural a parent? And that is what we must do—defend ourselves against the increasing

restrictions that England would put upon us for her own enrichment."

"*Tiens!*" Ralph sneered. "Hark to our little Whig orator. So, brother John, you've joined the mob. I thought you told me you were going to enlist in His Majesty's army?"

John turned his blazing eyes on his brother.

"Enlist—yes. In the Continental Army."

"The Continental Army!" Ralph threw back his head in sardonic laughter that was echoed by Hollifield. "That band of vermin! Are you stark mad?" He leaned forward. "Take care, brother, how you commit yourself these days. There is a right side and a wrong side of every fence. And if you get caught on the wrong side"—he leveled his forefinger at John and closed one eye—"you take the consequences."

"*You* better take care," Hugh muttered.

"Hold your tongue, puppy!" Ralph snapped. He peered across at Hugh and John, turning the stem of his wine-glass slowly. "So, this is the way the wind blows. A pair of snakes in the family grass. Very interesting to know." He exchanged a glance with Hollifield. "Very interesting, indeed. But let me warn you two once and for all. Join this yapping pack of mad dogs and you will be hunted down and butchered with them. Depend on it, England will waste no time ridding herself of this ulcer of rebellion. Nor will she hesitate to fight the devil with fire. When the slaves insurrect in your midst and the Indians descend upon your borders, I wager you will sit up and howl for quarter. Come now—recover your sanity and your honor before it is too late. Gentlemen, I give you His Gracious Majesty, King George."

Ralph stood up and lifted his glass. Hollifield followed his example. Gilbert got up irresolutely. His face was drawn and troubled. John remained seated, and Hugh with him.

Ralph's face went white.

"Stand up, you skunk!"

There was the thump of overturned chairs and the scuffle of feet, the gasps of quickened breaths. Gilbert blocked John's way.

"Stop! Get back! Not a word, Ralph. John, is this true that you intend to cast your lot with the revolutionists?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you must leave this house. Your mother's plantation is yours as I promised. I shall expect you to leave here in the morning."

John met his father's eyes in silence. He bowed and left the room. Hugh followed him.

Gilbert stood looking at Ralph.

"I don't understand how you could allow yourself to make this scene with your brother."

Ralph shrugged his shoulders and finished his madeira.

"John's headed for disaster," he said, taking a handkerchief from his cuff and touching it to his lips. "Come along, Major. If you will excuse us, sir, we'll join Catherine in the drawing-room."

Ralph linked arms with Hollifield, and they left the room. Gilbert sat down and poured himself another glass of wine. For a long time he sat motionless. His eyes were fixed on the flame of the candle before him.

When John had finished packing, he went downstairs and out on the terrace. The crisp night air felt good against his hot cheeks.

Lost in somber thoughts he had walked as far as the rose garden and was turning back when he saw that a cloaked form was coming toward him. It was Dorothy. They walked down the lawns to the river edge and talked in the broken sentences of lovers who are just becoming aware of their love.

Later, when they went back to the house, they avoided saying good-by until they had climbed the steps and stood before the door. Then John found that he was unable to trust himself to speak; he could only raise her fingers to his lips. But very suddenly he felt her in his arms, and then it was easy to pour out all the turmoil in his heart, to exact vows and to make them.

◈ ◈ ◈

On the fifteenth day of September, 1775, Lord William Campbell, the new governor of South Carolina, took refuge on board the frigate *Tamar* in Charles Town Harbor. The discovery of his attempts to stir up the back country and the Indians precipitated his flight. Among the staff that accompanied him was Major Ralph Sheldon.

◈ XII ◈

CAROLINA, listening nervously for the approach of forces that would challenge her newborn independence, was easy prey for rumors of Indian massacres and negro insurrections. As a result many persons left the state: some for the West Indies, some for the comparative safety of northern cities. Catherine Sheldon, now Mrs. Prentiss Hollifield, accompanied her friends, the Izards, to Philadelphia, whence she obtained passage to England to await the speedy reduction of the seceding colonies and the return home of her soldier husband.

When Gilbert Sheldon learned that his son Ralph had been Lord Campbell's agent in the attempted fomentation of massacres and insurrections, he was cut to the heart. But still he was torn between the desire to join his neighbors and the necessity to refrain from bearing arms against his king and flag. On the sultry June day that brought the first clash, the Battle of Fort Moultrie, he sat on the lawn at Malvern listening to the faint boom of cannon that came up the river from Charles Town Harbor; and when the rider he had sent to town returned with the tidings of a sensational victory, he would permit himself no expression of the joy he could not help feeling. He would not permit himself even to inquire for word of John, who was with a battery on James Island, or for Hugh, who had run away to enlist. He waited in a fever of impatience for Eliza to make the slow coach journey to town and

back, but he vouchsafed only a nod to her news th
both boys were unharmed and had stood up we
under their initiation. The letter that she put into h
hand he avoided reading until she had left him

"Dear family," it said in John's bold strokes, "Victor
is ours! I assume by now you have heard all the de
tails, but how I wish you could have seen that grea
fleet come sailing in upon us—a gallant and terribl
sight. The fort rocked under their broadsides, but th
shot sank into our spongy palmetto logs or buried
harmlessly in the sand filling. 'Mind the fifty-gu
ships,' Moultrie kept telling us as he coolly smoked hi
pipe. Once the flagstaff was shot away; we could hea
the British cheering; but our Sergeant Jasper restored
the flag to the ramparts. Have you heard of this brav
exploit? If we had had the powder, the ships mus
have struck their colors or been sunk. As it was w
tore them to pieces. We are all wild with joy, and
can hardly believe our senses. After the battle Genera
Charles Lee, who had been so discouraging before
came and reviewed us in high good humor. He, no
Moultrie, received the praise and thanks of Congress
Sir Henry Clinton and Lord Cornwallis have retired
hastily from the wild myrtles and sand dunes of Long
Island after a month's planning how to cross the inle
to Sullivan's Island. We found an unfinished letter
saying, 'we are catching the merry devil from heat and
the moschetoes, than which no torment can be greater.
Poor beggars. I have been keeping an eye on Hugh
who got out here somehow with the 2nd Regt. He
and I rowed over to the cottage at Mt. Pleasant and
carried off all the pavillion gauze we could find. I
you have been able to get any more of the precious

stuff please send it out to us against the night pests. Home soon, we trust, and in the meanwhile love to all."

◈ ◈ ◈

For three years after the Battle of Fort Moultrie the state was unmolested by war. Men went about their business again, and Charles Town, being one of the few open ports, welcomed to her harbor and her wharves the ships of all neutral countries. Gilbert spent these years in an agony of loneliness. He avoided town and his neighbors, most of whom were supporters of the revolution. The family circle was narrowed to Eliza and Dorothy. John stayed at Seabrook, his Edisto plantation, and Hugh spent most of his time there, coming to Malvern occasionally to see his mother and his sister.

Hugh brought the news one day that the Marquis de La Fayette and Baron de Kalb had come to offer sword and fortune to the American cause. They had come ashore at Mr. Huger's plantation near Georgetown, and he had brought them to town, whence they would be escorted to General Washington's headquarters.

"British extremity," Gilbert said to Eliza, "makes French opportunity. We discard our own blundering but conscientious king and intrigue for the favor of a king whose tyranny is real. Since when has the King of France been a friend to the oppressed? Are we to accept this strange metamorphosis without a blush? Are we to forget religious and racial antipathies, and treacherous and bloody wars? The King of France and the Sons of Liberty! France seeks revenge, and that we should be the instrument of that revenge fills me with dread and misery."

Dorothy went to town often to visit friends, and it was there that John came to see her. He held an officer's commission now and had obtained leave to go north to increase his knowledge of war by serving under Washington. When he returned, he and Dorothy would marry. But his return in the spring of 1778 was enveloped in a rush of events that brushed aside the wedding. The British had taken Savannah, and General Prévost was beginning his march into Carolina.

At Seabrook the silence of a soft spring morning was broken by the sudden thudding of horses' hoofs and the clatter of scabbards. A company of dragoons swung out of their saddles and approached the house. In response to the hammering of pistol butts, the door was opened by a badly frightened overseer. When he had answered several questions put to him by the leader of the dragoons, he was locked in a closet. He listened trembling to the movements of the men searching the house from attic to basement.

Presently the closet door was opened and the overseer called out into the room. Several dragoon officers were seated at a table on which were bottles and glasses. Their leader addressed the overseer.

"Your master," he said, his lips curled in a cruel smile, "was expecting a dove for his cote. Am I mistaken?"

The overseer stared blankly at his questioner.

"Am I mistaken" the officer pursued, "that your master was expecting to bring a bride here?"

"Oh, yes, sir—no, sir. That is, Captain Sheldon was

on the point of getting married, sir, to Miss Dorothy Williams from St. Andrew's Parish. Yes, sir."

"Indeed! And we have invaded the nest just at mating time. The birds have flown. What a pity! Tell him, if you please, that his brother called to inquire after his health."

The overseer was thrust back into the closet. After a while there was the thumping of boots on the stairs and in the room overhead. Slamming, cracking noises, followed by loud laughter. Moments of silence and more laughter. The crash of glass. Boots descending. A confusion of voices. Then long silence.

Straining his ears in the darkness, the overseer thought he heard the crackle and roar of flames.

The following morning when Gilbert was at breakfast, they brought to him a breathless, haggard man who said he was the overseer at Seabrook. When he had taken a cup of brandy, he told his story: how he had escaped from the burning house and hidden himself in the woods long enough to see the plantation slaves being herded off in the direction of Savannah; how the dragoons had killed or driven off the stock and polluted the wells; how he himself had ridden to Malvern when he had found his way to Charles Town cut off by the advancing columns of Prévost's army. With an unconscious sense of the dramatic he left until last the identity of the leader of the raiding dragoons.

That afternoon Gilbert got out his sword and pistols, put a few necessities into his saddle-bags, and rode to town. He crossed the lines of defense just before the arrival of the enemy's vanguard.

Thus Gilbert Sheldon at last threw in his lot with his younger son's. But he found no opportunity to strike an immediate blow for the cause that was now his; for after a two-day parley Prévost discovered that reënforcements for the town were approaching, and he withdrew to James Island. Here, later, the Battle of Stono was fought, and Gilbert's opportunity came. Although he was past sixty, his strength was still great. He was in the thick of the fire for hours. When his horse was shot, he fought on foot, until he found that he was growing dizzy and faint. He knew that he was wounded, but there seemed to be no pain, and he refused to give in to the rising flood of languor that was beginning to blur his eyes. At last he sat down at the foot of a tree on the edge of a pasture. Hazy forms drifted by in a confusion of muffled musket-cracks. He felt all at once very tired, and it was impossible to keep his eyes open any longer. Under his coat he could feel the thick wetness of blood; but he was not able to lift his hand. He was being carried away on little surges of oblivion. Dimly he wondered if he were dying. . . .

When he regained consciousness, he was at Malvern. John was in the room, and Hugh, and Dorothy. And Eliza's voice was telling him that the British were retreating to Savannah and that he must not move or talk, but sleep. And that, Gilbert found, was very simple.

◈ ◈ ◈

The repulse of Prévost's expedition gave the state a year's respite. Gilbert's breast wound healed slowly, but throngs of old friends came to Malvern now, and the

house that had entertained royal governors became a hotbed of rebellion. John Rutledge, the new governor, came often to spend a day with Gilbert, to show in his gruff way how happy he was that the man he had known and loved for years had acquitted himself, and to discuss the prospects of Carolina as an independent commonwealth. General Moultrie came, young Colonel Pinckney, and—more to visit John Sheldon than Gilbert—the fiery and radical Christopher Gadsden. There were long, eloquent conferences on the lawns or before the fireplaces of the drawing-room. The battles of Fort Moultrie and Stono were refought and new battles planned should the British return to the attack. Gilbert was helped to forget the pain of his healing wounds and the deeper pain that came with thoughts, at once sorrowful and bitter, of Ralph.

John made his home at Malvern. He divided his days between Seabrook, where he was building a new house, and the warehouses of Sheldon & Blakesley, the management of which Gilbert had turned over to him; and twice a week his presence was required at the muster house of his parish militia company. His entrance into the law and his marriage to Dorothy awaited the culmination of the war.

◈ ◈ ◈

When Sir Henry Clinton advanced up the west bank of the Ashley River prior to his siege of Charles Town, Malvern was overrun with redcoats. Gilbert was in town with John and Hugh. The soldiers were not uncivil to Eliza and Dorothy, but they raided the pantries and amused themselves by throwing furniture

out of windows and disfiguring walls and mantels, until the word was passed around that the house was the property of Major Ralph Sheldon.

A few hours later Major Sheldon himself put in an appearance, wearing the uniform of Colonel Tarleton's Legion. He found Eliza and Dorothy in the upper hall. His legs were perfectly steady but his eyes, glazed with drink, betrayed to them his condition.

"Ladies," he bowed, "you must excuse my dusty and grimy condition. I have just come from exterminating a small body of partisan horse."

He smiled pleasantly as he took off his gloves.

"Will you have your servants prepare a bath?"

Motionless, Eliza and Dorothy faced him.

"The servants," Eliza told him in a voice she fought to control, "have fled from your barbarous mercenaries."

"Well! In that case, ladies, there seems to be nothing to hinder you from doing the honors yourselves."

"How dare you!" Eliza flung at him. "If your father were here—"

"Ah, yes. My dear father. Another dog to hunt."

Eliza put her arm round Dorothy. They turned to leave the hall.

"One moment, *mesdames,*" he called. "Not so fast. I have something further to say. General Cornwallis will make this house his headquarters, and it will be your privilege to entertain him. You will find it to your advantage to observe the amenities."

They went into Eliza's room without replying; the door closed, and Ralph heard the key turn in the lock.

With the aid of his body-servant he completed a careful toilette in his father's room and, refreshed and

scented, went down to the living-room, where he made himself comfortable with a flask of brandy. Presently he called to the sentry in the hall and instructed him to detail two guards to fetch Miss Dorothy.

"You may suggest to the young lady, in the event she appears reluctant, that it is infinitely more becoming to be docile."

He listened with a faint smile on his carmined lips to the tread of the guards' boots. Were they forcing the door? . . . No. Evidently she was coming gracefully.

She stood in the doorway.

"Come in, sweet flower," he bowed, motioning her to the chair before the fire.

He whispered a word to the guards in the hall, closed and bolted the door. She was standing by the chair, staring into the fire.

"Pray be seated, my angel," he said as he came over to her.

"What do you want with me?" she asked without looking at him.

"You talk like a play, Dotty, dear. One of Gerald's farces. What do I want with you? Nothing improper, I promise you,—Brother John's tastes have never been mine." Fingering the silver crescent insignia at his throat, he regarded her closely. "Now, fair step-sister, let us waive pleasantries and come to more pressing matters. As elder son of this house I have a natural interest in the family plate. I assume you know where it is hidden."

"I'll never tell you."

"That, dear Dot, obviously remains to be seen. How I wish I had time and inclination to wheedle it out of

you with gentle, patient coaxings. Yes." His voice and manner changed abruptly. "Look at me! I'll brook not a second's nonsense from you. You hear that? You'll tell me at once." He seized her wrist and twisted it.

Tears rushed to her eyes, but she was steeled. "I'll never tell you. Never."

"You fool." He forced her into the chair. "Tell me. Don't provoke me—I warn you." Her white lips were locked and defiant. A spasm of rage flashed into his eyes and he struck her across the mouth. "You rebel slut, tell me, or I don't know what I'll do to you. Scream. Keep it up. There's no one to help you." He held his fist close to her face. "See that? Tell me or I swear to God I'll mark you for life. Will you tell me? Will you?" Eliza's cry came from the hall and the sounds of a struggle against the door. Dorothy tried to rise, but Ralph thrust her back. "You won't tell me? You won't? Well, damn you!"

He struck at her, beat down her hands. The rings on his right fist opened a gash in her cheek. He struck again, deepening the gash.

She slipped to the floor, and he stood over her, panting. . . .

◈ ◈ ◈

It was spared Gilbert to see his home in the mutilating hands of the enemy. When Charles Town fell, after a desperate resistance of more than two months against overwhelming odds, Gilbert was held prisoner with other Continental officers at Haddrell's Point across the Cooper River. Here his health failed and because of his age he was released on parole and allowed to return to his home; but by this time Corn-

wallis had moved his headquarters up-country, and Malvern was liberated.

It was a heartbreaking home-coming for Gilbert. The house bore the scars of bayonet and boot and the lingering contamination of its Hessian occupants. The grounds, too, had suffered: trees had been wantonly felled, rare shrubs slashed down, and plants pulled up by the roots. The place looked as if it had been in the path of a violent storm. Finally, there was the ugly scar across Dorothy's cheek, which his own son had made and which Gilbert could hardly force himself to look at.

John had escaped after the surrender of Charles Town and had joined the Swamp Fox, who was ambushing and harassing British expeditions into the country. But Hugh was still in Charles Town, chafing under the parole of a disbanded militiaman. When he learned from his mother what had befallen his sister, he haunted the Tory balls and assemblies and the tavern meeting-places of British officers.

At last one day when Hugh was sitting alone in the alcove of the Broad Street Coffee House, three officers of Tarleton's Legion came in, and one of them was Ralph. Their eyes met, and Dorothy's brother got to his feet. Now that the moment had come his body shook so that he could hardly govern it as he walked toward his step-brother, who stood waiting, cool and contemptuous. Hugh made a lunge, but he was intercepted by the other two and after a scuffle overpowered and held.

"Still the young wildcat," Ralph smiled, adjusting his necklace, "and ever the bumpkin." For all his cool steadiness it was apparent in his voice and eyes that he

had been drinking heavily. "You appear," he said thickly, "to be nursing some grievance—"

"I'll kill you," Hugh gasped.

"I daresay you'd like to. But fate, I suspect, has arranged some other destiny for me. Now permit me to instruct you in the finesses of redress. You first flick your glove against the offending fellow's cheek—thus! Oh, he doesn't flinch or squirm. He merely stiffens, bows, and says: 'At your service.' You see? It's all very simple. The seconds look out for the rest."

"I challenge you to fight," Hugh shouted.

"Well met." Ralph bowed. "And now since we seem to be attracting some attention, perhaps it would be well to retire to a more secluded spot. Release him, gentlemen, and follow me."

The party went upstairs to a private apartment. Ralph's brother-officers, after some preliminaries, placed their double-barreled pistols at opposite ends of the room's long banquet-table, and the duelists took their stands. Ralph's eyes were gleaming slits, and his lips wore a set smile; Hugh's eyes were wide, and his chest rose and fell rapidly with his wild breathing. There was an instant of tense silence as the handkerchief rose. Before it fell, two ear-splitting explosions jarred the windows. Smoke hung under the low ceiling, and the odor of powder spread through the room. Ralph lowered his pistol, from the muzzles of which trailed twin wisps of smoke. Hugh stared dully across at him. He tried to pull the triggers of his own weapon, but his fingers were numb. His arm dropped, and the pistol struck the table. One of the balls that had pierced his heart was imbedded in the paneling behind him. . . .

In the hall Ralph thrust a purse into the hand of the

proprietor, who forthwith conducted him and his companions down a back stairs to a side door.

◈ ◈ ◈

One day shortly after Hugh's death John Sheldon with a small party of Marion's Brigade was able to penetrate as near to Charles Town as Malvern. He left his horse in the swamps and crept through the woods to the house.

It was dusk when he made his way back to the hiding-place of his comrades. The nearness of a British patrol had interrupted his visit, but he had had several precious hours with Gilbert and Eliza, and with Dorothy. And as he swung into his saddle and took his place in the little cavalcade that moved by instinct along the dark swamp trails, there was throbbing in his thoughts his grim parting words to his father:

"Some day I'll find Ralph. Some day God will put him in my way."

◈ XIII ◈

THE war in the Southern Department was being prosecuted with increasing success by the Revolutionists. General Gates had been badly drubbed at Camden by Cornwallis, but Cornwallis had, in turn, been badly drubbed by hurriedly gathered backwoodsmen amid the autumn splendors of King's Mountain. At Cowpens, Morgan had overwhelmed Tarleton's crack cavalry. Everywhere Marion's brigade of planters and farmers was preventing or punishing the "domiciliary visits" of the British.

On the eighth day of September, 1781, at the little settlement of Eutaw Springs a force of several thousand Continentals under General Greene engaged, in the half-light before dawn, a superior force of British under Colonel Stuart. After a sultry morning of savage fighting, Greene was able to break Stuart's lines, but a noon thunder shower and the sacking by his men of the British camp (which contained a quantity of rum and brandy) prevented his following up the advantage, and the enemy rallied and held their ground. Later, however, they weakened again and began to withdraw southward toward Charles Town. The battle became a chaos of running skirmishes in field and forest.

Captain John Sheldon, separated from his detachment after a disastrous clash with a body of British horse, was skirting the edge of a field of maize, urging his jaded, sweat-patched mount over the uneven and

sandy soil in the hopes of soon meeting some of his scattered troop. As he reached the far side of the field and was preparing to turn into the woods again, he caught sight of the scarlet coat of a fallen British officer, who was sitting propped up against a nearby sycamore tree, his head forward on his chest, his face half concealed in the rumpled folds of his neckcloth. His left hand, chalk white, pressed to his side, was outlined against his blood-stained waistcoat; his right clutched still the hilt of a long pistol. Close by in the sunlight beyond the shadow of the tree lay a dead horse, whose wide, glazed eyes stared at the sky where a trio of buzzards circled leisurely.

John dismounted and approached the wounded man. He was about to kneel and examine the wound when the head lifted. Ralph Sheldon's blood-shot eyes peered up at his brother without recognition.

John stood transfixed, unable to move, unable to think. A shudder ran through him. He became aware that recognition was creeping into his brother's eyes, that they were losing their vacant look and beginning to glint. He saw that Ralph's fingers were tightening on the hilt of the pistol, that the barrel was coming up, that the trigger was cocked. And yet so great was the impotence that gripped his limbs that he was powerless to raise his foot quickly enough to kick up the weapon that was aimed at his head. There was a blinding, deafening roar—the sharp sting of powder in his face. . . . His brother, he realized slowly, had missed; and now John felt the release of upsurging rage. He threw himself on his brother, felt for his throat, pressed down with his thumbs, cursing and sobbing.

John's hands suddenly relaxed. He staggered to his feet and stood over his brother, trembling violently.

Ralph, coughing and choking, kept his eyes on his brother.

"Come on," he whispered hoarsely. "Finish it. Don't be afraid—I'm helpless." His voice failed, and he raised himself on his elbow and spat at John. Then he fell back with his head against the tree. His eyes were dim again, and his face wore a deathly pallor.

John watched his brother with horror. He was uncertain what to do. . . . From somewhere far off came a crackle of musketry that snuffed quickly out. Then there was a silence so vast that the drunken flight of a bee, the sudden buzz of a fly, were events in the late afternoon sunlight. The shadows of the forest trees were stretching across the field. In the distance was the faint and incongruous donging of a cow-bell.

John was murmuring to himself:

"I can't leave him here to die."

Ralph's eyes were closed now, but when John leaned down to look at the wound, the heavy lids lifted. The wounded man made an effort to push his brother away.

"Get away," he said feebly. "Don't touch me. I loathe all of you. But don't think I'm through with you yet. I'll strip you all of everything you possess. I'll make you kiss the ground under my feet. Don't come near me, I tell you."

Ralph's head fell forward in a swoon. John stretched him out and pulled off his coat. With his saber he cut away the clotted front of the waistcoat and the linen next to the skin. When he had dressed the deep

wound as best he could and bandaged it with strips of his own shirt, he fetched from his saddle-bags a flask of brandy, which he held to his brother's lips. He remembered in a flash the day years ago in England when he had fallen from his hunter and Ralph had picked him up in his arms and carried him a long way to a farmer's cottage. That Ralph was dead. This Ralph's eyes were opening again. They were veiled with exhaustion and pain. He made no resistance now.

John lifted his brother gently and carried him over to his horse. He lifted him into the saddle and swung himself up behind. With one hand guiding the horse and the other supporting Ralph, he started through the woods.

The sun was setting when he reached the river. He could no longer keep the wounded man on horseback. He dismounted and laid Ralph at the foot of a tree, while he went along the shore in search of a canoe he knew of in the vicinity. In the inlet of a creek he found it, drawn up under bushes on the bank. He launched it and paddled to where he had left his brother and the horse, which he unbridled and unsaddled and turned loose. With the saddle and blanket he arranged a bed in the canoe and laid his brother there. Then he pushed out from the dark shadows of the shore into the twilight of midstream.

As dusk settled on the river, wedges of summer ducks flew over the gliding canoe on their way from their feeding grounds in the marshes to their roosts on the pineland ponds, their swift formations outlined against the fading sky. Between the long, rippling

dips of his paddle John could catch their faint cries. He could see that his brother's eyes stared up at the birds.

Gradually the dark mantle of night shrouded marsh and shore, and stars shimmered in the waters that slid softly by the canoe. Ralph's eyes were lost now in the gloom, but there was the sound of his slow, labored breathing. No indication of suffering escaped his lips, no slightest moan or sigh; he lay motionless. John thought that he must be sleeping. But later when the moon rose above the trees and sent a glimmer over the river, he saw that the eyes were still staring upward. They were so fixed that John leaned forward with a start and touched his brother's knee.

"Ralph!"

The eyes turned down to meet his.

"I thought for a moment you were dead."

He could distinguish a faint smile on the bloodless lips. A strange, husky whisper came forth.

"Regret disappointing you. Take my time about that—long time."

John resumed his paddling. The eyes were closing wearily. Sleep must come soon.

The golden light turned to silver as the moon drifted languidly up through the night hours. The chorused of crickets and katydids that made the dark shores vibrate with sound became one with the trance-like silence that engulfed the canoe. John had the sensation of being drawn up to a great height above the world, and his mind looked back over a past that seemed like a long dream. He saw himself and the people of the world performing the complex but recurring steps of a fantastic dance. He felt a great

sadness for the dancers, who were impelled by secret winds to weary themselves and never rest; he felt that he understood the souls of all men as well as he understood his own and in understanding them forgave them for sins which were somehow not really theirs—and in forgiving them came in the end to love them. To feel this way was weak, he thought. It would pass, this mood. The heart, after this rare vision of the beauty and terror behind existence, would return to its practical preoccupations. But now, in these few secret hours, it was not necessary to hate even his brother. . . .

It was in the early hours of the morning that the canoe swept past the landing and terraces of Malvern. The house looked unreal in the wan light.

Current and ebbing tide brought John and his brother to the barrack-wharf at Charles Town before dawn. Dim forms of soldiers lifted the wounded British officer from the canoe and made a litter to carry him to his quarters in the town. John was taken into custody and locked in the "Provost" to await transference to one of the prison hulks in the harbor.

◈ XIV ◈

AT last came the happy night when the cry echoed through the streets of Charles Town:

"Half past twelve of a stormy night, and Cornwallis has surrendered!"

Still the town remained for several months in the hands of the enemy. Then in November, 1782, came the peace, and the British made preparations for the evacuation. Nine thousand citizens and negroes besides the army were crowded into the departing fleet. Two hundred of the slaves were the property of Major Ralph Sheldon; he had seized them in a last raid on Malvern when he foresaw that the evacuation was inevitable.

Ralph Sheldon transported his two hundred slaves to a large plantation that he purchased in the Bahama Islands. Beyond this nothing is known of his fate. His name is still met with in certain of the out-islands, where it has been appropriated by the numerous fishing and sponge-diving descendants—whose skins range in shade from pale yellow to rich brown—of his former slaves.

A year after the close of the war John was married to Dorothy in the parish church of St. Andrew's. They continued to make their home at Malvern.

◈ ◈ ◈

The closing years of his life Gilbert Sheldon devoted to restoring Malvern to its former state. The house

was in need of extensive repairs; the gardens had lost many rare shrubs and exotics; most of the slaves were gone, the blooded horses, the live-stock. But these losses were at length redressed despite the hard times of reconstruction, the prostration of trade, and the scarcity of money. New plants replaced the stumps of the old, and the gardens glowed again with the bright flames of flowers; slaves were bought, the stables, barns, and pastures replenished, the house renovated from top to bottom. Malvern began once more to send fast horses to the races, and Sheldon punch resumed its popularity at the Jockey Club balls,—an event for which ladies kept their best gowns and gentlemen their choicest liquors.

The plantation consumed Gilbert's attention: here was all that really interested him, all he really loved. John was looking after Fairfield and Seabrook and the Charles Town business; they were in capable hands. John was, in fact, a source of great satisfaction. Already he was doing well in the law and fast becoming a citizen of prominence. People liked him, trusted him, spoke well of him. It was gratifying to have such a son and heir. But the town and his son's activities were out of Gilbert's scope: the world had shrunken to Malvern. Here was a world that could be mastered, that presented few complications and no disappointments,—a world where one might continue interrupted dreams and prepare onself for the long sleep.

He went rarely to town. It took a visit of Washington, a momentous horse-race, or a special meeting of the Cincinnati to bring him in from the country, and even on such occasions he was to some extent unhappy.

The old faces, he said, were vanishing with the old landmarks. There was actually an agitation afoot to pervert the spelling of Charles Town to *Charleston:* it was a symptom of a topsy-turvy world. Customs were changing and decaying. Architecture, for example, had gone mad: in place of good square brick houses men were putting up unsightly oblong affairs set endwise to the street and with tiers of West Indian verandas. Dress, too, was degenerating, manners were growing lax, and people were losing their charm. Above all, the town was full of French refugees from the massacre of St. Domingo, and the French were a threat to Anglo-Saxon civilization—let people say what they pleased.

So Gilbert confined himself to Malvern, and with the passing months and years thrust his roots deeper and deeper into the soil he loved. Could he have been privileged to see himself as Eliza and John and Dorothy saw him, he would have beheld a slightly captious but extremely lovable old gentleman, with shoulders held a little too erect and a walk that strove to conceal a slight limp, and with eyes that still met life with an eager challenge. He would have beheld a man who was not altogether unconscious of the admiration that people paid him and that he accepted as his due; a man whose solitary position as the grand old man of the parish was inclining him toward those idiosyncrasies which, in younger days, he had always laughed at and promised himself to shun—long, rambling reminiscences—infallibility—impatience at contradiction. In the bosom of his family these eccentricities were winked at, but when visitors came to Malvern, neighboring or town potentates who possessed and

flourished prejudices of their own, there were interminable conflicts, dogged but courteous, lasting often well into the night and sometimes enduring for days.

Except for these occasional disturbances—as intense and as soon over as summer storms—the ways of Malvern were rich with a deep and pervading peace. Gilbert's days were pleasantly crowded with the many details of the plantation and in particular with the culture of the new crop, cotton, which was taking the place of indigo. In the evenings there were the journals that John brought out from town, and these presented a miscellaneous study very attractive and engrossing to a country gentleman and furnished him with ammunition against certain follies of his age. He liked to stretch out on the living-room sofa after dinner, surrounded with a pile of favorite books (within battered blue covers like a band of Continentals after the war) and a confusion of newspapers. Here he was not infrequently overtaken by sleep with a volume straddling his nose or a copy of the *Federalist* covering his head and chest, and snoring gradually from a lower to a higher key, wakened himself with a sudden burst like a bark. On such occasions he would remark to his family that the tall clock put him to sleep, and in truth it had a very narcotic tick; but he would never admit that it was possible that he had snored. His pride prevented him from risking a second betrayal by the clock, and he would abandon his sofa and reading-matter for a game of piquet with Eliza.

The birth of a son to John and Dorothy in 1794 gave Gilbert a new interest in life and one that soon became the ruling passion of his days. For years he had been awaiting—at first with good-humored impatience, at

last with patient despair—for the arrival of a grandson. The event placed him on enchanted ground. From the beginning he took the infant in charge. He watched him being bathed, suckled, and sleeping. When the little light-blue eyes opened, he sat smiling into them for hours.

Gilbert could hardly wait for the boy to grow big enough for a saddle. He began to fear that before young Charles would be capable of moving about in the world, he himself would have left it. This fear gave an added tartness to a chronic subject of banter between Eliza and Gilbert. With them a contest had long been in progress as to who would outlive the other. Begun in a moment of random raillery on the day of their marriage, it had become with the passing of years an increasingly earnest game.

Every morning after breakfast when Gilbert sent for his horse, Eliza would appear at the door. She would watch him mount stiffly, and when he was about to start off, she would call to him:

"I hope, sir, it's not your intention to ride this soon after breakfast."

"You have guessed my intention, ma'm," he would nod with a smile.

"You seem to have forgotten," she would sigh, "that only last night you were complaining of pains in the back."

"Pains in the back? Who said anything about pains in the back?"

"I own, sir, that I am at a loss to understand how some of us can forget so speedily our ailments."

Gilbert would clear his throat and prepare to touch

his whip to his horse's flanks, but then he would remember something.

"Liza, I've cautioned you against going out of the house these damp mornings. You know your constitution couldn't stand a chill."

"I come out, sir, because my conscience forces me to remind you that this riding each morning on top of a hearty breakfast is no proper caper for a man of your years."

Gilbert would force a laugh. "My years! Wait till I get to be an old man before you attempt to discipline me."

"You're not so young as you once were, Mr. Sheldon."

"My dear Liza," he would flush, "your discernment is startling. No, I'm not so young as I once was. Neither are you. Quite the contrary. And now that you call my attention to it, ma'm, I must remark on how very badly you're looking this morning. By George, you look haggard! Well, of course, at your age no woman can hope to look like much more than a scarecrow. I wish you good-morning, ma'm." And he would pretend to be on the point of galloping off.

"Gilbert Sheldon," she would call, "get off that horse and come in by the fire where you belong!"

"You guard the fire, my dear," he would wave to her. "Fires are for young lovers and old dreamers. As for me, I am neither young nor old."

"You'll be neither young nor old if your horse throws you one of these fine mornings. You should be in an armchair, not a saddle."

"I shall be riding, ma'm, long after you have de-

parted from this vale. I'll be here in Eighteen Hundred. I intend, ma'm, to see the century out. Can you say as much?"

"Much more, sir. I intend to live to be a hundred. And so, you see, it will be necessary for me to bury you."

Gilbert's merriment would recoil from the façade of the house and spread over the lawn. The groom's black features reflected his master's mirth.

"A hundred! Bury me! May heaven smite me if the woman hasn't turned simpleton. A hundred!"

And he would ride down the avenue laughing and exclaiming.

◈ ◈ ◈

The day came at last when young Charles attained his sixth birthday and was lifted into a saddle, and then Gilbert's satisfaction was complete. Not many weeks later Gilbert celebrated his own birthday. He was eighty-five and he had seen the turn of the century.

He felt that he must hurry now to instill in the quickening mind of his grandson certain ideals and ambitions. Particularly must he prepare the boy's mind to resist Republican propaganda. The fair promise and beautiful theories of the French Revolution had fired the imagination of American youth, and there had been the Jacobin Clubs in Charleston—rank radicalism; then the Reign of Terror and repudiation. So much for Republicanism: it was synonymous with Robespierre and Danton and the mob; it meant immorality, irreligion, lawlessness, chaos. Honest men were friends and followers of Washington and hence Federalists. Jefferson was a misguided dreamer. The ideal form of government was the Greek Democracy,

of course. Would Charles promise his grandfather to be a good Federalist? He would. And would he remember all the things his grandfather told him? Yes. The boy nodded patiently to the old man's solicitations.

In the spring following his eighty-fifth birthday a morning came when Gilbert was unable to climb into his saddle. He told Eliza in a casual voice that he had decided to give up riding for a while; his eyes told her what a heavy blow he was suffering, and her own gave him the sympathy that was too deep for words.

He saw now that he was approaching the valley of shadows and he was seized with a tenseness like that of one who contemplates a fall from some great height. He thought that he was about to wage a long, ghastly struggle before he would be able to surrender his life into the hands of death. But in this he was mistaken: the mood of horror faded, and he began to think of himself as preparing for a long and dreamless sleep. . . .

In the warm, sunlit days of April he had them move his favorite chair to the terrace where he could sit and look at the river. On his knees rested his Plutarch and Montaigne. But he seldom conned them now. Instead his dimming eyes watched the boy Charles moving in the setting of the renewing spring. Dogwood and jasmine again, roses and wistaria. . . . His last spring. But even he renewing himself in the boy —the spring of his winter—himself again. . . . Over him fell the flickering silhouettes of branches and leaves, now slightly tremulous, now in the wildest turmoil, according to the caprice of the April wind. . . .

Age, they said, had worked a final miracle in making him gentle. It was beautiful to see how time had mellowed him and softened at last the proud spirit, how tolerant he was now and how infinitely kind. But, in reality, he had forgotten them all. The living were dead; and the dead, living. . . . He was standing back in the light of distant days, and Mary Blakesley was by his side, her eyes shining with love. Another spring long ago. . . . Then far, far away in sunlit woods familiar voices and close, soft laughter. . . .

PART TWO

I

IT is a sparkling autumn morning at Malvern in the year of Grace 1830, and Eliza Sheldon is returning with her family from a summer in the mountains. A modern barouche drives up the avenue and circles around to the front door, followed by a coach of a style grand but entirely obsolete. On the high box of the coach sits an old black coachman, whose vast dignity gives him the air of continuously detecting a malodor; on the foot-board behind the spring-hung, faun-colored body of the coach clings an old footman, whose dignity is jeopardized by the precariousness of his position. When the coach comes to a stop, the footman jumps stiffly down, opens the crested door, and lets down the steps. From the mulberry velvet interior that matches the liveries of the two servants issues a querulous little voice.

"Plato, call Lake."

But Lake, the robust young butler, is there already, bowing and smiling, and all the house slaves crowd around with a jumble of greetings, until a sharp summons from Charles Sheldon draws them reluctantly off in the direction of the neglected barouche. Lake lifts out of the coach a being whose person and apparel

make her antique equipage look like new and her two veterans like children. In this caricature of old age the Eliza of former years is scarcely recognizable. Her face is incredibly wrinkled, and the right side, including the eye, seems to sag. Only the left eye is unchanged: still straight, still bright, and still the window of an indomitable soul. There is a twinkle in that eye which leads people to assume that senility is softening its owner's mind, and a tendency on the old lady's part to translate the twinkle into words and stampede the conventions of social intercourse has reënforced this view. The widow Sheldon is prone to chuckle when others are solemn and to sigh when others smile, and such conduct of course signifies to every one that she has entered at last her long-deferred dotage.

Lake carries his mistress, clutching her cane, up the front steps and into the cool, paved hall. She tells him to take her to the river door first. When she has squinted her good eye over the lawns and the river and the rice-fields, she gives a nod of general approval and directs her bearer upstairs to the drawing-room, where she has herself deposited in an armchair before the full-length Sully portrait of Gilbert Sheldon. Lake retires, closing the doors softly behind him; already he can hear the mumbling of his aged mistress in converse with her dead husband. He frowns and gestures into silence the excited, chattering servants who are coming up the stairs with the luggage from the barouche and the coach, and takes his stand at the doors to the drawing-room to ward off the children, whose laughter and scamperings ring up from the hall below.

The children were never allowed to intrude their persons and their noises upon their great-grandmother unless they were specifically asked to do so, which was seldom the case. Eliza did not encourage them, because she was not, as a matter of fact, fond of them. She was never disagreeable with them; for her they scarcely existed.

The reasons for this were few but potent. In the first place, Eliza had but slight regard for the parents. Her grandson Charles suffered eclipse when placed beside his father, the late John Sheldon, or his grandfather, Gilbert Sheldon. He seemed to be diluted Sheldon; he had, moreover, being an only child, been spoiled. Diluted Sheldon, spoiled; enough to make but half a man—lazy, selfish, weak. The weakness evidenced itself in his addiction to drink and gambling (everything was a possible provocation for a bet or a drink, or both) and in his willingness to leave his affairs largely in the hands of overseers and factors. But it had evidenced itself most clearly, Eliza thought, when he had allowed Martha to inveigle him into marriage.

As for Martha, Eliza esteemed her even less than she did Charles. She had been the scheming daughter of an inferior family of Charleston Huguenots and she had simply pursued Charles, who had found it much easier to be courted by her than to take the trouble to court some one else, until he had agreed to marry her. But Eliza might have forgiven Martha for marrying Charles; she secretly admired the gall that permitted the woman to think herself good enough to occupy a Sheldon bed. For bringing into the world puny, unattractive children, however, no forgiveness was

possible. And to pamper them into chronic whinishness was to add insult to injury. Whining Sheldons! Above all, to name them Matthew, Rachael, and Mark —what names for Sheldon children! How she had grumbled to Gilbert's portrait. Later, no doubt, there would be Luke and John, then Peter and Paul, a pious flock of disciples, or worse, New England names of prophets—Ezekiel and Jeremiah. Martha was a religious fanatic; that was something else the matter with her. She couldn't, Eliza remarked to Gilbert, take her religion in moderate quantities or not at all, like decent folk. She must be intoxicated with grace; for her every moment involved a religious principle, unflagging vigilance was necessary, life was a drab preparation for joy everlasting.

There was, however, a partial exception to Eliza's general indifference toward the children. In Mark, the youngest, she showed a slight interest. Little more than a babe in arms, he offered the possibilities of uncertainty, he was still amorphous. Perhaps something could be made of him; she had been impatient all summer to get back and talk with Gilbert on the subject.

She sat in her armchair in the drawing-room looking up at him and saying:

"Mark is different from the other two. He's a Sheldon. He has your eyes, Gilbert, and the same dark hair you used to have. And he has your nose. Yes, he's going to look like you—if he doesn't take the fever."

"They shouldn't come back from White Sulphur," he said to her, "till after the first frost."

"That's what I tell them, but they won't listen to

what an old woman has to say. They would rather chance it. Very well, they'll soon find themselves childless, which would be for the best—save for Mark. Don't think me heartless, sir, but I believe that no Sheldons are better than bad Sheldons."

"Do you think there's danger of fever—this year?"

"There's been no frost here yet." Eliza looked at Gilbert in thoughtful silence for a minute. "Gilbert, I have a good mind to take Mark in to Charleston till a killing frost comes."

Gilbert nodded.

"Let Charles and his Martha," Eliza went on, "protest as much as they please. I'm going to take charge of that boy Mark."

The old lady pounded her cane on the floor and called shrilly for Lake. The doors opened, and the butler appeared.

"Fetch the boy Mark and his nurse," she told him. "And then tell your master that Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert Sheldon wish to speak to him and his wife."

Eliza took Mark to town the following day. At the last moment her conscience prompted her to offer to take Matthew and Rachael, too, but Martha refused. It was bad enough to have the old fool running off with Mark, but Charles had thought it wise to humor her to that extent.

Two weeks later came the first frost. It came too late to save Matthew and Rachael from the fever. Both children had been complaining to their nurse of the mosquitoes that stung them after dark and left itchy red spots to be scratched next day. They had almost distracted her with their whining, and it oc-

curred to her that the fever might be a judgment on them for making such a fuss about next to nothing.

Cure for the fever was as unknown as its cause; treatment was drastic; recovery among children, rare. Matthew and Rachael succumbed with startling suddenness, and this was a final vindication for their great-grandmother's indifference toward them. They were not Sheldon children at all, for no one of Sheldon blood would surrender so promptly to death. She accepted their fate with philosophy, and this broke the last semblance of harmony between herself and their mother. It was from now on open warfare, centering around little Mark. Sharp weapons were employed on both sides; and, by a bewilderment of intriguing, Charles was drawn from one to the other and back again.

Eliza stopped at nothing. She bribed the nurse and the house mauma, conspired with the coachman, created dissensions in the kitchen—anything and everything to distract the mother's time and attention and gain Mark for herself. Since Martha never guessed to what lengths her rival was going, she was badly worsted in the struggle. She had the affliction of seeing her child, her only remaining child, being stolen from under her nose; and in her chagrin she so far forgot her Christian self as to ask God to consign Eliza to some suitable region at His earliest convenience.

But God in His infinite wisdom saw fit to allow Eliza to remain on earth—to test, perhaps, the depth of Martha's faith. The old woman, who each day seemed to shrink a visible amount and to gain an added luster to her good eye, was instilling into the budding consciousness of Mark strangely unorthodox leanings.

Something must be done, Martha clamored to her husband, to rescue the boy from the reprehensible influence of his great-grandmother. But Charles was of no help; he stood in very real awe of Eliza. The mother feared to attempt any high-handed tactics herself, because Eliza's method of retaliation was to tell devastating and plausible lies throughout the neighborhood. The situation was extremely painful.

"Am I not," Martha said to Eliza one morning at breakfast, "to be allowed to raise my own child?"

"Not Mark," Eliza snapped back. "If you desire more children to spoil, ma'm, I suggest you go birth them."

It was a minor clash; but it was portentous. Not long after Martha gave birth to a girl baby, whom she christened Eliza with what seemed to be either irony or capitulation. As a matter of fact it was neither. She had the baby christened Eliza because she hoped to divert old Eliza's attention from Mark. It was naïve strategy; and it met with no success whatever.

The struggle was now essentially over. There were occasional aftermaths of bickering, but these were more from force of habit than emotion. Martha became engrossed in her new child; she had relinquished the other. Mark belonged to his great-granny.

He loved it. To him she was no grotesquely wizened old woman with a cane, but a wonderful spirit with a wand to invoke a magic world. He never tired of hearing from her seamed lips tales of enchantment woven from the myriad strands of her memory. When the weather permitted, she hobbled with him through the gardens, stopping frequently to catch her breath or to scrutinize with a relentless one eye the work of

the gardeners, until they came to the dark waters of the cypress pool and the brick wall—almost hidden by high azalea bushes—that bound the plantation's God's-acre. There was a heavy wrought-iron gate that Mark learned to swing open for his graygranny: under a great, widespreading live-oak was a tomb of stone, black with age and weather; and in the shades of other, lesser trees and in patches of sunlight were large, flat stone tablets, supported by bricks and with writing on them. Mark could name them all to his graygranny, and with each name went the fantastic fragments of pictures that his child mind had salvaged from the old woman's reminiscings. The best of all was the tomb, because that was the one they always sat by and most of the stories were about. Some day when he grew big and strong, graygranny said, he could climb up and read the writing on the tablet at the top of the tomb. He knew it by heart already—*Here lie the Earthly Remains of Gilbert Fitz-Hugh Sheldon,* was the way it started—but it would be wonderful some day to climb up and read for himself. It was next to this tomb that the space was where graygranny said she was going to sleep after a while with earth for a blanket. This made him shudder and want to cry; but it never did to cry with graygranny, because it made her angry, and she would make him repeat a hundred times—*The. Only Virtue is Courage.* If his tongue got twisted, he had to start again.

Most of the time she told him glamorous tales. Of Lafayette's return to Charleston and the great ovation given him, as great as the one given Washington; of General John Sheldon's record in the War of 1812; of the great Revolution and its battles, and of the siege

of Charleston; tales of the distant days of her own childhood, of the Indian wars, of the threatened slave insurrection. In her rambling manner she unfolded for him a vast and colorful pageant. She impregnated the boy's mind with her own spirit and temper.

She was permitted to be with him until he reached his seventh year. Soon after his birthday she took cold from lingering too late one afternoon in the damp gardens, and at last the flame of the candle that had burned so long and so steadily fluttered in the breath of death. Her mind, struggling against disintegration, was besieged with tumultuous and crying memories. She was unwilling to die. There was Mark; was she not to watch him growing into Gilbert? And there was so much yet to see. The follies of mankind to laugh at. The new steam packets, the railroad all the way to Augusta at a breathless speed. Speed by sea and land; men would be taking to the air next. But would they be any the happier for all their mad rushing about? Of all the inventions, all the progress of her lifetime there was only one piece of magic that stood out in her estimation as a great blessing—the match. Of all else she was uncertain. But the world was very interesting. This was no time to be leaving. A little later perhaps. . . .

If she could only make them understand that she wanted them all to clear out of the room. Would they not have the decency to let her die in privacy? She wanted only Mark. Gilbert, of course, and Mark. Let the others clear out. . . . The idiots!—she would make them understand if she had to burst her throat to get out the faint sound. Only Mark and Gilbert. . . . There, at last they understood. Mark, yes. Mark and

Gilbert at her side. There. Now she could rest. . . . It was too bad to be dying. When you were not quite ready. Gilbert, you could have waited a little longer. Do you need me, dear? . . . Mark. Was he crying? It was necessary to set him a last example. No tears, boy. Only one virtue, Mark, only one answer to life and to death. . . .

◈ II ◈

THE winter of 1846 was long remembered in the low country as one of the most severe ever experienced. There was a heavy frost early in September, crops were ruined, storms ravaged the fields and wiped out rice dikes. Migrating birds accustomed to winter at Malvern paused that year only for a few days and then moved on south. Weather prophets foretold a bitter winter, and autumn backed them up. The leaves burst into flames and burned quickly out. Then bleak winds set in, and Charles Sheldon felt justified in anticipating by a full two months his usual January-February tryst with the sideboard. Martha Sheldon had her chair and writing-desk placed before the fire that she might toast her back while she wrote Mark and nibbled from a dish of molasses candy.

"My dear son," she said. "Your father and I were glad to get your letter and know that you are in good health, but we were both distressed that you chafe under the strictness of your first year at college. Your father says that you must remember that success and happiness must be earned by hard work.

"Apply yourself diligently to your studies, I beg of you. Shun bad company and promise me that you will not add your name to the list of Carolina triflers whose conduct has brought a college such as Princeton into disrepute. Your father won quite a literary reputation when he was there, and I hope you will follow in his footsteps. He is always saying, 'I expect great things of Mark.' Follow his example and not the

example of those whose minds are taken up with smoking, drinking, and excessive love of finery. And do not, my dear, above all things become one of those indigenous bipeds whose greatest ambition it is to show silky mustaches and be known among the ladies as 'a dangerous man.'

"I am glad you like your roommate. I hope he is a good Christian boy who will set you no bad example and with whom you will enjoy yourself innocently. . . .

"Our intention is that you come home for your Christmas holidays even if only for two or three days. Be frugal and do not attempt to vie in wasting money with the sons of rich planters who go to college only for fashion's sake. . . . It seems so hard to make young people realize that the three most worth-while things in life are Faith, Hope, and Charity. Although you are a boy of extraordinary quick parts, you have an undoubted tendency to be wild and willful, for which you may thank your great-grandmother, who had a very sinister influence on you in childhood. Your only salvation is through Christian duty. Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen—ah, what vital years are they in a young man's life! And how I shudder at the thought of how I stand, in the persons of my children, exposed to calamity. Could you know my anxiety about you, I think that (independent of nobler emotions) a spirit of compassion for an afflicted friend would make you conduct yourself wisely.

"We have put an advertisement in the paper for a tutor. I consider it a mistake to send children off to school before the age of nine or ten, and Luke you know is barely eight and John six. As for the girls, twelve and thirteen is a little too young for Miss Bart-

lett's. I say the girls just as if Nancy were also your sister, but the child comes over from Deems Hall so much to stay with Betty and they are so inseparable that I think of them both as daughters. . . .

"Until I received your letter I was filled with extreme worry at your long silence. It is very mortifying to a parent as tenderly attached to a child as I am to you to think that since you left for Philadelphia last summer you have written but once.

"All join me in love. Your father wishes me to tell you that he is sending your allowance through Mr. Quean, the new factor. He also desires me to inform you that if you run into debt your two hunters and your dogs will be sold to pay the bill. May God bless you. Your loving mother, Martha Sheldon."

◈ ◈ ◈

A clear, crisp November morning vibrant with golden sunlight that seemed doubly bright because of the preceding days of cold wind and rain. The children, released at last from the confinement of the house, were popping with gay energy on the lawns. Their mad frolics carried them in follow-the-leader formation down the terrace to the river, out on the dock (where little John came within an inch of being crowded off the edge), back between the placid butterfly lakes that mirrored the sky to the summer-house, through which they passed with a run and a jump, for it was bad luck, Maum Binah said, to pause under the old copper lantern that hung from the roof. From there they carried their revels across the bridge to the spring house and the rice mill. They sailed boats in the mill brook and got their feet wet; went on to the pond

and got their feet wet again. Here they lingered long, launching bark fleets on the leaf-sprinkled water and shooing the cruising squadron of ducks that in defiance of all nautical propriety were incessantly turning up their sterns to the sky.

The chanting of the four washwomen drew them to the spot where clothes were spread out on the grass to dry. Their somersaults were interrupted, but they carried away with them the bow-legged pickaninnies that had been playing soberly at their mothers' feet. They went on to the stables and barns and threw stones at the pigeons that strutted and pouted on the roofs; they made a long digression around by the pasture to make faces at surprised cows; and at last they boosted one another over the brick wall and came out on the great front lawn. Here they espied Jim, the favorite stable-boy, who was leading away from the front steps the horse from which his master had just dismounted. He was commandeered and persuaded to help Betty and Luke into the saddle. Luke exchanged his coon-skin cap for Betty's bonnet, and intoxicated with fun the miniature parade, now increased by a pack of dogs from the Quarter, moved boisterously down the avenue. The noise had reached an indescribable clamor by the time the party had reached the gate and was on the point of debauching into the highway. Then the sudden apparition of a tall, gawky young man on horseback struck the parade dumb.

"I calculate," the young man said, eyeing Nancy, who looked more self-possessed than the others, "this is Mr. Sheldon's farm."

"This is Malvern—Mr. Sheldon's plantation," Nancy said.

"Malvern. That's hit. Straight up this lane?"

"Yes, sir."

"Giddap."

The young man turned his horse into the avenue and rode on toward the house, painfully conscious of the rout that fell in behind and followed him with whispers and poorly suppressed giggles. At the front door Lake came to his temporary rescue by disbanding the black element and conducting him to the living-room. But the white element, lingering in the hall for a moment to compose themselves, pursued the caller. They entered the room with many go-firsts, knee-hunchings, and scufflings. There was a scramble for chairs, stifled snorts. Then they sat bursting with pent-up giggles. They dared not speak; a word would have snapped the cobweb of their gravity. The stranger sat with the palms of his hands pressed together, regarding the patterns of the cornice. When Martha Sheldon appeared, he handed her a letter with a stiff bow.

"This is to certify," Martha read, "that Mr. Josiah Evans, the bearer, is in good standing with the church and congregation at Stamford, Conn. Moses Larkin, Pastor."

Martha Sheldon was pleased, and after she had talked with him a few minutes, she engaged him to teach the children. As she explained to her husband later, Mr. Evans's mind and manners might not be too cultured, but it was evident that his heart was in the right place and that he was a good, sound, Christian young man—which was more important than surface polish.

Mr. Evans started the next day's teaching with a bang.

"I calculate," he told his little class, "hit's pretty hard to git edication down in these parts. I figger what makes so many of you Southerners dark complected is being nursed by niggers and you get your ignorance from the same source. And your talk too. Now the first thing I want you scholars to do is git red of these peculiar ways of talking. And we'll start," he added, running his long fingers through his greased hair, "right from the word go."

But Mr. Evans was not successful in helping his charges to get rid of their peculiar ways of talking. He was not successful in teaching them anything, nor even in keeping them in order. The unfortunate young man was outwitted at every turn and grew thin as a fishing pole. It became evident even to Martha Sheldon that Mr. Evans must be allowed to depart, for his own sake as well as the children's.

Mr. Evans was bitterly disappointed. He had been sent south as a combination missionary and investigator by an Abolition society, but he was not meeting with success. Frustration and homesickness eventually sent him back north, where he apprenticed himself to a house painter and spent his spare time recounting to eager ears the mental and spiritual degradation of the South. His tales of slavery horrors were given wide circulation. They were marvels of morbid invention.

After the departure of Mr. Evans, Martha Sheldon took it upon herself to instruct the rowdy class. The attempt was a fiasco from the beginning. She was able to cope effectively with the thousand and one deviltries of the study-room, but she floundered when it came to leading her colts to the waters of knowledge. She was able by sheer force to push their heads in, but it

was quite impossible to get them to drink. She, too, lost weight—although that with her was a matter for congratulation rather than regret—and began to welcome the frequent interruptions from kitchen and pantry that at first had fretted her. When she was called away on some household business, she prolonged her stay as long as possible. In consequence the study-room was in an almost continuous uproar.

Martha put off the inevitable until the last moment. But as Christmas and Christmas baking drew near, she gave in. Everything considered, she informed her husband resignedly one morning, home-study was unsatisfactory and it might be best to send the children to school in town after the holidays. In that event, she added, it would be necessary to take a house, and Nancy, whose widower father would want her to go to school with Betty, could stay there too. She insisted on the house to spite her husband, because of the failure of Mr. Evans and herself, which he had prophesied, quite as much as because she wished to be near the children. But if she fancied she was punishing her husband, she was sadly mistaken. Charles Sheldon shrewdly feigned a passion for the country; he enjoyed nothing so much as the club dinners, the whist gatherings, and the congenial company of town and by pretending to his wife to abhor social life he was able to make frequent excursions there.

◈ ◈ ◈

At the dawn of Christmas day the boom of a miniature cannon shook Malvern's terrace, struck the woods across the river, and boomed back. The pungent puff of white drifted up toward the gray, cold sky.

Chuckles and exclamations of excitement escaped the little gathering of servants, and there was a rush for the house. Jim, the young mulatto groom, led the way and at the living-room door he was the first to shout "Chrismus Gif'!" He stood in the doorway, bowing, grinning, and pulling his forelock.

Mark in his dressing-robe and slippers called to him from the chattering group before the fire.

"Wait for me up in the room, Jim. And get everything ready."

Jim flew for the stairs, and Mark pulled an orange out of his stocking a little ruefully. He was sorry that Jim had seen him engaged in this childish Christmas stocking business. The night before he had sworn he would not hang up a stocking, but his mother had looked pained and he had yielded. Now here he was playing the child with Betty, Luke, and John. He pulled out the rest of the stocking filling in silence.

Luke was watching his older brother with shining eyes and when he saw that Mark had finished his stocking and was about to leave the room, he sprang up.

"Mark! Let me go hunting with you. Won't you?"

"He don't know how to hunt," John piped from the floor. "He couldn't even kill a dead cow."

"You shut up," Luke told him. "I can too hunt, Mark."

Mark shook his head.

"You couldn't keep up. Wait a while. Besides, Mother and Father will expect you to go to church."

"Won't they expect you, too?" Luke asked with large, round, disappointed eyes.

"I came home to hunt. When you get to be a man you can do as you please, too."

"You ain't a man yet," John informed Mark's retreating back. But Mark pretended not to hear; it was fatal to dignity to be drawn into an altercation with the imp John. In the hall he paused to look into the dining-room, where Lake with his customary holiday smile was humming "Come on to Jesus" as he set the table for breakfast; then with a little shiver of happiness he went on upstairs. He heard his mother and father moving in their room and knocked at their door.

"Merry Christmas!" His mother's voice. "Who is it?"

"Mark. Merry Christmas."

"Oh, it's you, dear. Sleep well? Are the others down?"

"Yes, ma'm,—they're all down. Can't we have breakfast soon? I'm going hunting with Jim."

"Why—I expected you to go to church with all of us. You can go over to the meet at Woodlands tomorrow."

"Oh, Mother! Do I have to give up hunting to go listen to that preacher?"

A sudden silence in the room; then his father's voice, —severe, petulant: "Mark!"

"Yes, sir."

"No hunting to-day, young man. I'm surprised at your speaking to your mother in such a manner. Do you hear me, sir?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good, sir."

Silence. Mark walked on down the hall and into his room. He threw himself on the bed with a groan.

"Put them away," he said to Jim, who was sitting by the window rubbing a pair of boots.

"Ain' goin' huntin', Maussa Mark?"

"Church!"

Jim blinked at his master until he had thoroughly absorbed the bad news; he turned resignedly back to the boots.

"Dese yere boots," he said presently, holding them up to the light, "is somet'ing else. Where you git dese boots, Maussa Mark?"

"Philadelphia. That's where all my money goes. That's why I haven't got a present for you this year."

Jim rolled his eyes in embarrassed unbelief.

"Think I'm fooling?" Mark asked him.

Jim forced a grin.

"I got nothing for you this year," Mark yawned. "Sorry."

He got up and went to the fireplace to throw on a log. He moved from there to the window and with his nose pressed against the cold pane looked out at the bleak river.

"What a day for hunting!" he sighed. "Almost looks like snow." He turned back to the room. "Don't stand there grinning at me, nigger. You look too foolish. Told you I got nothing for you."

Jim's grin grew to vast proportions.

"Maussa Mark," he chuckled low. " 'E ain' fo'git 'e Jim."

"All right—wait and see."

But the ludicrous combination of grin and growing doubt broke Mark down.

"You no-account devil!" he laughed. "Suppose I'd forget you? Forget my mammy first."

"Enty I know all de time," Jim beamed.

Mark went to the closet and pulled out his old riding

clothes and boots. He thrust them into Jim's astonished arms.

"Great Gawd!" Jim burst out in a treble of realization. "Is you meanin' you' Jim fo' hab dese fine clothes?"

"Don't stand there with your mouth hanging open," Mark said from the edge of the bed where he was sitting to pull on his socks. "Put them on right now. We're going riding even if we can't go hunting."

After breakfast Mark went out to the front steps to watch his father and mother distribute gifts to gangs of slaves: for the women handkerchiefs, which they twined about their heads; for the men woolen caps, which they flung into the air; for the children rock candy, which they popped into their mouths. Laughter, singing, shouting. Several buckets of hot punch appeared and circulated freely in the company of large baskets of gingerbread. It was the beginning of the three-day Christmas festival.

Mark left the noisy scene and started toward the stables to meet Jim. Behind him was his father's drawling voice calling out above the uproar the names of those who were about to receive gifts—Joab, Clarissa, Prince, Jenny—. Hundreds of them. He felt again the little Christmas shiver. . . . Some day he would be standing in his father's shoes, calling out the names. Then Malvern and Fairfield and Seabrook would all be his. And Deems Hall, too, if he married Nancy. But Nancy was—well, in the first place she was only thirteen years old. Of course she would grow up in time. Where was she this morning? Yesterday she had said something about coming over before breakfast: her stocking had been pinned up with the

others, and there was a place for her at the table. She would probably be at church with her father. . . . Jim was coming along with the horse.

I won't show her I even know she's living, Mark thought as he took his bridle from Jim and swung up into the saddle, because it would look foolish for me at Princeton to notice a thirteen-year-old girl.

They trotted down the avenue and out into the River Road. Jim, a little self-consciously erect in his new turnout, chattered away at a great rate about plantation doings: how Anthony lost his foot at the rice mill; how Jut had run away and come back after a dismal week in the swamps, glad to be home; the latest cunjuh of old Maum Binah—rattlesnake flesh and chinaberries; how Judith had dropped triplets at the wedding-party of Maydy and Chance; how the northern overseer at Deems Hall was always separating families; the traps that had been set for rabbit and fox; the thick furs that all creatures had this year; the death of the race-horse, Rasselas, who broke his leg and had to be shot; the abundance and tameness of the deer. At last he came around to tell—awkwardly, obliquely—how lonesome and lost he had been during Mark's absence.

The little family procession moved along the gray road toward church. The woods were bare and bleak save where here and there a magnolia or holly burned with a dark green flame or where a blackjack clung tenaciously to its russet leaves.

Martha Sheldon occupied a carriage with Betty, Luke, and John. Mark rode behind with his father, who was radiating good cheer as a result of certain

Christmas morning understandings with the sideboard. From time to time he made a sudden gallop by the side of the carriage to repeat a joke or comment on the weather. Mark, he admitted, was right: it did look like snow. Still it was impossible to be dogmatic about it. It might rain. Or it could clear.

When the procession turned off the highway into the grounds of St. Andrew's, Mark held aloof, while those in the carriage entered for the cold monotony of the Reverend Mr. Hankinson's opening prayer and for the first hymn, which must have failed but for the aid of the coachmen in the gallery. Several youths of his own age lingered outside, too, hanging on the outskirts of the group of men who were postponing until the last moment their entrance into church. Mark felt toward these youths, his neighbors, his former intimates, a strange restraint. They were attending college in Charleston; he was a Princeton man. He would have liked to be cordial with them, but something held him back and made him act stiff and reserved. They reciprocated, and he felt hot and cold and wished the men would make up their minds to go in. Nancy, he had seen, was there with her father. When she had looked at him, he had pretended that he was intent on what the men were saying.

It seemed to Mark that his father always saved his best story for the last. Its effects were seen on the partially-composed features of the gentlemen as they entered the church just before the giving out of the text. Mark slipped into the Sheldon pew after his father and bowed his head, moved his lips mechanically. Then he sat up and looked as if he were listening to the droning words of the Reverend Mr.

Hankinson while his thoughts hovered for a time about Nancy's bonnet and then flew out of the window.

Presently his thoughts came back to Nancy's bonnet. He became aware that his feet were cold, that he could see his breath, that Christmas dinner would taste very good. He began to wonder if the people behind were thinking about him and not the sermon just as he was thinking about Nancy. Was Nancy coming home for dinner?

It developed after the service that Nancy was coming home for dinner and to stay over night. But when Mark found himself alone with her for a moment in the living-room just before dinner, he could not find a word to say to her. He found it difficult even to look at her, which he admitted to himself was very strange and silly. He stood with his back to the fire whistling softly and rocking on his heels.

"You're going back day after to-morrow?" she ventured shyly.

"Yes," he told his finger-nails. "And next summer I may not come back to this part of the world. My roommate wants me to visit him at Newport. Or I may go abroad or out west to the Mississippi country."

"Oh. Wouldn't that be wonderful."

"Well, it certainly would be better than a summer at Sullivan's Island."

He excused himself to wash for dinner, and she sat staring into the fire. She felt like crying without knowing exactly why. Something was the matter; something terrible had happened to him at college. She had hoped that he would come back eager with questions and answers, full of teasing and affection and laughter.

He did relax a little after dinner. When the Christmas tree was lighted and the hymns sung, he sat next to her, and he chose her for partner for most of the games. But when the musicians came in—Runny and Toby with their fiddles, Esau with his bass viol, Jake with his triangle and drum—Mark stood off in a corner by himself, and she was compelled to sit with Betty and Luke and John. She followed the movements of the slave dances, the event of the plantation year, with listless eyes.

Later when between dances the lamps were lighted, Nancy slipped out into the hall, hoping vaguely that Mark would come to join her there. Instead Betty appeared, and Nancy drew back into the shadows to avoid her. Betty went upstairs and when she was out of sight, Nancy tiptoed to the eastern end of the hall and pulled open the door. Over the river was gray dusk. Her teeth chattered in the chill, damp air. The iron railing under her hands felt clammy and dead. She gazed off across the leaden river with sorrowful eyes.

Something cold, wet against her cheek. She raised her hand to touch the spot; then looked up incredulously. The sky was tumbling down in large white flakes like stars. With a gasp she turned around to the door, pushed it open, and ran to the living-room door.

"Mark!" she called. "Come quick! It's snowing!"

Late into the night the snow fell silently, gently and covered the terrace and lawns of Malvern with swan's down. The house was enveloped in a ghostly mist, through which shone palely the lights of the windows.

◈ III ◈

WHEN the carriage stopped before the Sheldon house on Church Street, Martha Sheldon allowed Diana, her soot-black but regal maid, to get out first with the bundles. Diana deposited them with a wink in the arms of Lake, who had come down the steps to the street; then she turned back to the carriage to assist her corpulent mistress to alight. It was an elaborate process. First, it was necessary to place one of Miss Martha's feet on the carriage step, which her proportions prevented her from seeing. Next, there was a pulling-up-out-of-the-seat maneuver in which the coachman lent a hand from the box if he happened to be on congenial terms with his mistress. Finally, there was a backing-out and easing-down process during which Miss Martha allowed her entire weight to rest on the majestic Diana. This last movement brought the mistress to the pavement, but it invariably brought down with it the maid's pride, for it was the source of hilarious burlesque among the house servants.

It was a sour smile that Mrs. Sheldon gave the dapper Mr. Huger, who passed with an elegant bow, as she waddled across the sidewalk to the steps. It was a sour smile not because Mr. Huger particularly deserved such a one (though, as a matter of fact, his wife was a Roman Catholic), but because Martha was feeling sour. Much was wrong with the world. It was Friday, February 13th, 1850, and the day of the first St. Cecilia ball of the season. Betty and Nancy were

coming out, and she—Martha—who hated social functions, had to chaperon them. She had nothing to wear; the rheumatism in her knees was worse again; she had a fever blister; and her shoes, all of her shoes, pinched her feet. Moreover, all morning long she had shopped for last minute odds-and-ends, but she had visited in vain every cloth merchant the length of King Street for the material needed for the *Godey's Lady's Book* bows that were to go on the lower hem of the girls' dresses. It was exasperating. And on top of everything the tea at Mrs. Vleck's, where she had stopped for a moment at noon (and stayed until four to hear the whole story about Eleanor Arcright's baby being born too soon after her marriage), the tea had been nothing short of poisonous and the cherry tarts had left her a trifle bilious. Yes, it had been a bad day, Martha told herself as she panted on up the steps and into the house.

In the hall she sat down for a moment to catch her breath and to have Diana take off her shoes.

After supper Betty and Nancy had to lock the door of their room to keep out Luke and John, who thought they were being funny with their teasing and mocking. They kept it up through the door and said such mean things and laughed so loud that the girls, who were on needles and pins anyway, had to call in Mark. He came down the hall from his room tying his satin cravat.

"What are you two up to now?" he asked Luke.

"We're not doing anything," Luke grinned.

"I know—you never are. Get back to your homework and let them alone."

"All right, grandfather," John said. He scampered down the hall out of Mark's reach. Luke withdrew reluctantly.

When Betty opened a crack in the door to thank Mark, he caught a glimpse of Nancy standing before the mirror in an aureole of lamp light. He started back to his room humming dizzily "The Gay Huzzar."

In the girls' room the black hands of Lucy, Betty's maid, competed with the brown hands of Tisha, Nancy's maid, in laying out on the bed, article by article, the apparel for the evening. Then the excitement of dressing.

". . . Bring the other lamp, Tisha."

". . . Pull it around in the back more, Lucy."

". . . Move that lamp over this way."

". . . It don't hang right yet. Get your needle, Tisha."

Endless nervous chatter. Giggled surmises of what the ball would bring. Whispers. Flurries of laughter. . . .

At last they were dressed. Followed by the flashing eyes and final ejaculations of Lucy and Tisha, they went stiffly downstairs to the parlor, where they found Mrs. Sheldon, resplendent in purple silk, waiting for them. She was seated on the spindly Duncan Phyfe chair which she still insisted upon occupying although it had long since failed to properly support her increasing proportions; and behind the chair stood the statuesque Diana, holding the slim dress slippers that her mistress never put on until the last moment.

Betty, coming into the room arm and arm with Nancy, had a feeling of vertigo when she met the eyes of the young man that was coming toward her with

Mark. The face, she thought, was the handsomest and the pleasantest she had ever seen; the smile was angelic. She felt that she was tottering across the floor.

Mark's voice:

"Betty, here's your partner—Bob Cranston, of Columbia. Miss Sheldon, Mr. Cranston."

Martha Sheldon with a sigh and a last wiggle of her toes resigned her feet to the dress slippers and with Diana's aid got to her feet.

"Well, children," she called to the little group before the fire, "we better be going. Your father says he'll join us later. Betty, you and Nancy come along with me. And Mr. Cranston, you and Mark take Diana in your carriage, if you please. You all look right sweet. Do don't get yourselves mussed up between here and the hall. Oh, my poor knees!"

Quacking, Martha Sheldon waddled toward the door.

The carriages rolled round the corner into Broad Street. A sea wind, salty and chill, caused coats and wraps to be turned up tightly around necks. Trees along the way writhed to keep themselves warm, throwing tempests of shadows across the patches of golden light from windows and street lamps. A few pedestrians hurried along the sidewalk, heads bowed against the wind, hands at throats. Overhead the stars were clear and cold.

The two carriages joined a long line of vehicles and at last drew up before the entrance to the hall. Martha Sheldon was assisted out and with her girls behind her panted up the steps, smiling greetings promiscuously, for her sight was a little dim, and it was not always

possible for her to distinguish friend from foe. Shy and flushed, Nancy and Betty followed her up the broad steps and into the confusion of the ladies' withdrawing-room. There was scarcely room to turn round and it was next to impossible to catch a glimpse of oneself in the mirror. With Diana's help flounces were smoothed out and ribbons patted into shape.

The girls half shrank behind the protecting bulk of Mrs. Sheldon as the dazzlement of the ballroom burst upon them. Eyes pricked them like showers of darts and their ears were assailed and their senses sent swimming by the babble of voices. The fireplace at which Mrs. Sheldon had arranged to meet several of her friends and toward which she now headed looked to the girls to be miles off as they tiptoed across the shiny floor. The band was making crazy preliminary squeaks and grunts.

By supper Nancy and Betty had recovered somewhat from their suffocating excitement. The smiling presence of Lake, who was waiting on the table, made them feel more at home, and they were able to smile themselves and talk almost naturally and even to attempt a certain amount of banter in the manner of the city belles, whose practiced ways they observed closely. But all was not well. A clumsy lout of a youth from Edisto Island had torn the lower hem of Nancy's skirt in his ambitious leaps and had smudged the toes of her slippers. Mark seemed to blame her for it, Nancy thought. He was very quiet during supper, while Bob Cranston kept up an eager flow of conversation with Betty. Mark, for all his fineness, was somehow unsatisfactory. He had been a glamorous figure at college, but his year in a law office had made him seem a little

disappointing from the point of view of romance. And he took her so for granted—that was what hurt most. Sitting here and not bothering to keep up much of any conversation. . . . Nancy welcomed the appearance at the table of Mr. Sheldon in the company of two oldish gentlemen, fragrant with punch, who joked elaborately about their dancing days being over.

At the close of the ball Nancy and Betty found Martha Sheldon in the dressing-room, where she had removed her slippers and was half off in a doze. When she had been gotten into her slippers and out to her carriage, the girls took advantage of her stuffed and sleepy condition to put Diana in with her and themselves slip into the other carriage with Mark and Bob.

On the way home Betty and Bob chatted gaily and obliviously while Nancy and Mark found themselves suddenly at swords-points about nothing and made the journey in tense silence. Bob's parting with Betty at the door-step was as long and tender as circumstances permitted; later in the upper hall Mark and Nancy said a perfunctory good-night.

In the bedroom Lucy and Tisha were waiting.

"Oh, yes, a heavenly time!" Betty sighed in answer to their questions. "But undress me quick, Lucy, I'm exhausted."

"See how Miss Nanny t'row him down on de bed so hasty," Lucy grinned as she began to undress her mistress.

"She rumple up dat party dress," Tisha frowned.

When at last they were undressed and in bed and the maids and the lights were gone, Betty put her arms around Nancy, who lay on her back staring up into the darkness with smarting eyes, and hugged her close in

a tremor of happiness. In blissful, broken phrases she began to talk about Bob Cranston—his eyes, hair, mouth, disposition, clothes, nose, manners, dancing, and finally his future. Nancy listened in silence.

◈ ◈ ◈

The next morning on the way to breakfast Nancy paused before the parlor mirror to verify the verdict of the bedroom mirror. Yes, she saw with approval, there were dark and becoming shadows under her eyes. She wanted Mark to see those shadows, and for this purpose she had left Betty still slumbering and had hurried to dress and get downstairs before Mark left for the office. She would show him a proud front and her lips would be gay; only her eyes and their shadows would tell the truth.

Her heart sank as she entered the dining-room and saw that Mark had gone. Mr. Sheldon was sitting alone at the table with the morning paper and the second cup of coffee. Nancy slipped softly into her place with an almost inaudible "Good-morning, sir."

"Well, my dear," he said, lowering his paper, "this is an unexpected honor from the belle of the ball!"

She managed to give him a wan smile.

"Feeling a bit peaked?" he winked.

"I reckon so," she answered with a forced little laugh.

"We'll soon remedy that." He folded his paper with a great rustle and called to the pantry door. "Lake, bring Miss Nancy plenty of piping-hot breakfast."

"I can't eat anything except tea and toast," she told him.

"Nonsense!" he chuckled. "Why, child, that kind of feed wouldn't keep a love-sick bird alive."

He sat regarding her with an indulgent smile. She smiled back, but she felt that silence was exposing all the unhappiness of her heart and she longed for the sheltering distraction of words.

"Has Mark gone to the office?" she found herself saying, and she could have bitten off her tongue.

"An hour ago. You don't catch that early bird napping. He's out to make a name for himself as his grandfather did before him—and his father, if I may say so." Charles Sheldon cleared his throat, took a long cheroot from his pocket, and clipped one end fastidiously with a silver cutter. When he had lighted the cheroot, he unfolded his paper and scanned it fiercely for a moment; after which he allowed it to droop to the table and turned his attention back to Nancy. "I was just reading to Mark about John C. Calhoun. That is a great name, a very great name. Young people don't seem to grasp the seriousness of his illness and what a critical situation confronts us. God forbid that our Pericles should be taken from us at this time, when the parasitic, hypocritical North threatens to bleed us dry as England once threatened the Colonies and when we are moving with ever-increasing momentum toward a second Revolution, a second blow for Independence, thank God, and the setting up in our beloved state of a great Greek Commonwealth."

Charles Sheldon took a deep breath and flowed prophetically on. The stiff bosom of his shirt creaked sympathetically with his wide and frequent gestures; his slim, manicured hands swooped and wheeled like

skylarks; and his fine head—hair and mustaches carefully dyed a jet black—nodded, tossed, and wagged. Nancy sipped her tea in silence, nodding when it seemed advisable, and thinking meanwhile of Mark.

Nancy found herself put to it to pass the long hours to dinner-time and Mark's return. Mr. Sheldon donned soon after breakfast his wasp-waisted great-coat, adjusted his beaver at the proper angle, took up his gloves and his walking-stick, and departed up Church Street in the direction of the Planters Hotel with the overyouthful swagger of a faded dandy, his left hand placed at the small of his back. The house seemed depressingly subdued after he had gone. Betty was still asleep, so Nancy went into Mrs. Sheldon's room. Martha was propped up in bed reading her Bible for the morrow's Sunday-school lesson. She hadn't, she informed Nancy, closed her eyes a wink all night long between cramps and the rheumatism.

Martha Sheldon resumed the first chapter of Job with a sigh of resignation, and Nancy excused herself to go to the sewing-room. Tisha was working on the hem that the clown from Edisto Island had ripped at the ball. Nancy looked in the mending basket for something of Mark's to darn, but there was nothing there except a pair of John's breeches with a torn knee. John was always needing darning she thought as she threaded a needle, and Luke was almost as bad. If even they were only here now with their laughter and teasing and boyish nuisance. They had left at dawn to visit the Pringle boy near Georgetown, and she wondered how they were going to stand their first nights away from home. How Luke must have hated

John's going; how he always protested against John's going anywhere with him.

But it made Nancy fidgety to sew. Talking to Tisha was a little company, but her tittering lisp was tiresome. When Nancy had finished darning the knee, she went downstairs to the library. Her eyes ran listlessly over the shelves. The classics looked a little more forbidding than ever. Among the new books Macaulay's *History of England, Vol. II,* still drearily demanded to be read. It would have to wait. *David Copperfield, Jane Eyre,* and *Wuthering Heights* were asking to be reread, but they seemed to promise no solace this morning. Could Mr. Thackeray's Becky Sharp or Amelia offer any comfort? Or Scott? Nancy thought not. She took out *The Passion Flower: A Christmas and New Year's Gift* and *Remember Me: A Token of Love.* Both bore amid the profusion of flowers and cherubs of the presentation page the inscription, *To Nancy Deems from her friend Mark Sheldon.* She turned a few pages at random and sadly returned the volumes to their places. She had no heart to take out even such tried friends as *Domestic Happiness Portrayed: A Repository for Those Who Are and Those Who Are Not Married* or *The Matrimonial Preceptor: Instructive Hints to Those Who Are and Those Who Are Like to be Married.* The library was no help; rather it quickened the dull ache within her.

She went to the window and stood looking out into the cold winter sunlight of Church Street. A mockingbird was perched on a branch of the tree at the curb; it was gone, leaving a momentary quiver to mark where it had been. Love, Nancy mused, was a mock-

ing-bird, and she was an empty, shivering tree. Had Mark ever really loved her? Had he ever done more than take her for friendly granted? No; he had never deeply cared. . . . The familiar sights of the street stood out in sharp outline against the realization of that truth: doddering General Pettigrew shuffling along for his morning constitutional with his spoiled granddaughter, who rolled her hoop into passersby and left it to her companion to apologize for her; Mr. and Mrs. Symons, of whom people said that she was the man and he the wife; Mr. Cardoza, the furniture man, mumbling to himself; jovial, garrulous Martin Bumgarten, an officer in the German Rifle Club, beaming at the world from horseback, his favorite hound at his heels; Judge King crossing the street to avoid Leslie Jones, the shifty-eyed ex-overseer who had accumulated a large fortune as a slave-dealer and was now a smirking social climber; now Judge King bowing to Mrs. Holland, garbed as usual in her eccentric, hoopless white dress and with a white cashmere shawl over her head and shoulders; the little Pinckney boy coming out of the house across the way with his nurse. The street began to dissolve in a burning blur, and Nancy turned from the window.

A little later she put on her bonnet and her mantle and went out. By the time she reached Broad Street, the golden air had lightened her spirits. Mark would be at his desk by the office window; he would see her and tap on the glass. She would take no notice of this, and he would rush out and overtake her. She would be perfectly polite, of course, but quite impersonal.

Nancy crossed Broad Street and passed stiffly under

Mark's window, head erect, eyes to the front. She realized with a pang that he was not there, and she walked on, irresolute, her thoughts in a little panic. Carriages and people moved by in a confusion that prevented her from answering the question that she was repeating to herself—What shall I do now? . . . The sudden thudding chimes of St. Michael's shattered the crystal of her senses and sent her whirling in the singing eddies of noon. The air trembled with bronze tongues that called Mark's name. The last of the chimes tumbled shuddering down and hummed away into echoes.

"What shall I do now?" she whispered.

"Come in," Tucker's Book Store called to her.

The jingle of the doorbell brought Mr. Tucker out of his backroom lair. Bent almost double he came toward her between the rows of shelves, peering over his glasses and rubbing his hands expectantly.

"Oh, good-morning, Miss Nancy," he smiled toothlessly. "You're quite a stranger these days. Well, there's a saying that happy people don't need books. So I expect you've been happy, Miss. And I hope your coming in to-day don't mean you're getting unhappy."

"No, indeed, Mr. Tucker," Nancy smiled.

"Glad of that. Now, let me see, what was it you wanted?"

"Lord Byron's *Don Juan.*"

Mr. Tucker adjusted his glasses in surprise, and Nancy was not able to keep from blushing although her mouth was firm.

"Don Juan?" Mr. Tucker repeated as if he had misunderstood.

"You have it, haven't you, Mr. Tucker?"

"Why, yes, I have it. But it ain't a book I'd be particular about selling to a young lady." Mr. Tucker scratched his chin pensively.

Nancy bit her lip. "I'm sorry, but I'll take a copy if you have it."

Mr. Tucker's lips compressed tightly. Without another word he went to the back of the store, took down a volume, dusted it off, wrapped it up, and came back to Nancy. She paid him and went out with a pleasant good-by; the only answer she received was the jingling of the bell as the door closed behind her. She felt that her cheeks must be flushed scarlet as she started up the street, but under her mantle she had a book that Mark had denounced, a book that he had told her no lady would read.

She passed Mark's office again; out of the corner of her eye she saw that he was not at his desk. As she walked on she debated with herself about walking around the block and passing Mark's window once again, but pride won and sent her down Church Street.

Betty was up and dressed when Nancy got home, and in a short time Bob Cranston called. Nancy sat with them for a while in the parlor, but at the first opportunity she excused herself and went up to her room. To be with these two, whose glances and tones told how obviously absorbed they were in each other, made her own loneliness and misery more intense. She rearranged her hair and put on the saffron dress that Mark said he liked. Then she sat by the window and watched the street. She saw Mr. Sheldon climb the front steps at a few minutes before two, but she did not go downstairs until she saw Mark coming, half an

hour later. When he came in, she managed to be in animated conversation with Bob Cranston.

Dinner was gay. Mrs. Sheldon, whose humors were always uncertain, sent word that she could hardly hold her head up and consequently was in no state to come to the table and eat a full dinner. If they would send her up just a snack, a little of everything. Not too little, of course, because when you were feeling ill you had to keep your strength up, and besides she felt that she had a touch of cold and a cold ought to be stuffed. Charles Sheldon, knowing his wife, sent her up large helpings of everything and a generous portion of sherry to settle her stomach. He had helped himself to several appetizers before dinner and that, on top of certain toasts that he had drunk during the morning, put him in a facetious and entertaining mood which ended only with the end of the meal. Nancy, laughing a little too gaily at the string of anecdotes he told, avoided Mark's eyes. When they were all getting up from the table, she said to Mr. Sheldon in a tone she strove to make casual:

"Are you going to the country to-morrow, sir?"

"I was intending to drive out, Nanny, to see how things are at Malvern. Any message for your father?"

"I want to go out with you. Papa's not too well, and it's selfish of me to visit away so long."

Nancy was glad that Betty and Bob had gone on into the parlor and had not heard: Betty would have protested too vehemently, too effectively, and the impression on Mark would have been weakened.

"Well, my dear child," Mr. Sheldon smiled, "I regret that you feel you ought to go home—to your other

home. But don't, I beg of you, stay long. We can't spare her, can we, Mark?"

"This is the time when all the best parties come," Mark said. "Do you really have to go home?"

"Yes, I do," she said without meeting his eyes. "Besides, they have parties in the country, you know."

There was a silence which Mr. Sheldon broke with a good-natured snort.

"Well, Nanny, have your whatnots packed, and we'll leave bright and early in the morning."

He led the way into the parlor.

When the others had gone—Mr. Sheldon into the library for his after-dinner nap, Mark back to Broad Street, Betty for a carriage ride with Bob Cranston—Nancy went out onto the long side veranda and down into the garden. The late afternoon sun threw shafts of golden light against the house, but the garden was full of cold shadows. A film of ice cased the fish-pond under the bare tamarisk trees, and the goldfish moved sluggishly as if they too were half-frozen. Here she and Mark had stood on that spring evening many months ago. That was dead now. It had been no more than a passing mood with Mark then. It was foolish ever to have loved him; it was above all foolish to have supposed that her love was or could be returned. There were too many other girls—wealthier, prettier, wittier—for him to choose from. She was merely a taken-for-granted friend, almost a member of the family, without mystery or glamor. It was best that she went home, away from this unsatisfactory world of balls and parlor chatter, back to the world of woodlands and field and sky, of horses and hounds, of

breathless rides and hunts, and of the happy tiredness at night. If she could take Mark back with her—; but he was not hers to have anywhere, and she must begin to forget.

She walked forlornly along the garden paths. Presently she was aware of Diana's voice calling to her from the veranda:

"Miss Nannn-ny. Miss Martha say time fuh tea."

Nancy found Mrs. Sheldon propped up in her chair before a roaring fire in the parlor. Beside her was a table with the tea things. Martha was helping herself from the already half-empty cake tray.

"My soul and body!" she gasped when she saw Nancy. "Have you been out in that clammy garden without a wrap? Let me feel your hands. Like ice. Child, you must be crazy."

"It wasn't cold, Miss Martha."

"Don't tell me it wasn't cold. Pour some tea quick. Diana, fetch the rum decanter."

Diana went to the dining-room and brought back a decanter, from which Martha freely flavored Nancy's tea and then her own.

"Drink up, child," she said. "Diana, more cakes. And bring some guava for the biscuits."

Mrs. Sheldon settled back in the cushions with a sigh.

"Do you feel better?" Nancy asked. "I'm glad to see you up."

"I was obliged to get up, Nanny. They would have starved me if I'd stayed in bed any longer. It isn't that I feel any better."

"That's a shame. Is it your liver, do you think?"

"No, child. It's no one thing. It's just that when

you begin to get to my time of life, the machinery starts wearing out. It's God's will. If it wasn't for my faith, sometimes I don't know where I'd be."

Martha Sheldon shook her head and took another cake. Then she suddenly remembered.

"What's this I hear about your going to the country to-morrow? Charles told me before he went to the club."

Nancy explained that she ought to go. Mrs. Sheldon protested. She had a horror of separations of any kind, and now when she found that Nancy was not to be dissuaded, she felt waves of melancholy flavored with hot rum sweep over her. She was on the point of gently relaxing into tears when Mark came in.

"Mark," she moped as he came toward her, "make Nancy stay with us."

He kissed her on the cheek.

"You didn't come up to see how I was at dinner-time," she complained, tidying her hair.

"Had to rush back to the office for a while, dear. I asked Father to give you my love."

"Your father never remembers such things."

Gently he rebuked her gormandizing, led her by degrees out of her doldrums, chatted town news to her, and got her smiling about old Mr. Hardwick's mis-adventure at young widow Bartley's hands.

"Men are such fools," she finally chuckled. "And always will be."

Mark turned to Nancy. She was holding a book under her arm.

"What are you reading?" he asked her.

She handed it to him. He read the title, flushed slightly, and handed it back to her with a bow.

"Mark," Mrs. Sheldon said, "how will you have your tea?"

"None at all, thank you, Mother. I think Nancy and I will go out for a little air. If she's willing."

"Betty and Bob have the carriage," Nancy said in a thin voice.

"Gone out toward Goose Creek," Mrs. Sheldon remarked, "and Heaven alone knows when they'll come traipsing in. It never occurred to them, of course, that *I* might need the carriage. I must say young people are very thoughtless these days."

"Do you mind walking?" Mark asked Nancy.

"Don't mind leaving me here by myself," Mrs. Sheldon sighed.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Mother. We'll stay here."

"Indeed you won't. I hope I'm not selfish enough to ask anybody to put themselves out on my account. Run along, I haven't finished my Sunday-school lesson yet. Run along."

"We're just going to walk around the Battery."

"Don't forget that supper's at seven."

Martha fished among the cushions for her Bible, opened it on her knees, and reached for the last cake on the tray.

Nancy and Mark walked in silence to the Battery and through White Point Gardens, where a party of boys were playing Red Rover. Their shouts and laughter died away behind and were lost in the boom and hiss of waves against the seawall. The restless harbor seemed not to belong in the same world with the calm magnificence of the sinking sun.

Mark suggested that they turn up Legare Street; and

then they went west along Tradd with the last golden flames of the sun blinding their eyes; past Chisolm's Mill at the end of the street; beyond the outlying houses; and along the roadway that traversed Trimble Marsh. With the marsh behind them and the broad Ashley at their feet they stopped and sat on a log by the side of the road.

The sun was gone, leaving a red afterglow that the river reflected. Mark's voice, breaking the stillness, sounded funny and strained.

"Nan, what's wrong?"

"Nothing. Why?" Her own voice sounded hollow.

"Why are you going home—to punish me for last night? I'm sorry if I was rude."

"That isn't anything. I was rude too."

"No, I was the one. And I'm ashamed of myself. Forgive me. We've always been such good friends. . . . I'd hate to have you go away angry with me."

For Nancy the afterglow was becoming leaping streaks of fire. She fought to keep down the great lump that was coming up in her throat.

"Nan, you must forgive. Please."

"Oh. . . . It isn't that."

"Nan, listen to me. . . ."

She hated herself for crying. Long ago she had promised herself never to cry again. It was weak: it meant that you were sorry for yourself. She took a deep breath.

"I'm sorry. I don't know . . . what's the matter with me."

She dried her eyes quickly and gulped down the sobs that kept trying to force their way up. Mark was pulling at the fingers of his gloves and glaring at the

dark line of trees across the river under the flaming sky.

"Don't you think we better start back?" she said. "It's getting cold. And late."

When she started to get up, he caught her arm.

"Wait, Nan,—listen to me. You mustn't go away."

"You don't care. We don't either of us really care whether we're together or not. It's just a . . . habit."

"I care. I'd flattered myself into thinking that you did. I'd thought it was—understood."

"You've been taking too much for granted."

Silence. Cold wind was beginning to steal up the river, stinging their faces and rustling the dead grass stalks at their feet. The flames in the western sky were dying softly down.

"I think we better go," she said. "Please. I'm cold."

He sprang up and helped her to her feet. They started back along the roadway toward the lights of the town. But before they had gone many steps, he stopped suddenly, put his hands on her shoulders, and swung her round facing him. She looked up at him with trembling lips.

"Nan. You're not going home, hear. We've got to stop this nonsense. You're going to marry me. Will you, Nan?"

"You don't care enough, Mark. Some one else—"

"You know better than that. It couldn't be any one else. We belong to each other. You know that. It's true that we haven't been very sentimental or romantic, because good friends and companions don't act like heroes and heroines in books. You know that. But I've loved you ever since I can remember."

"You never told me."

"I thought you knew. Do you love me? Do you love me at all?"

Somehow the blurring, burning tears would come back.

"I'm afraid I've never loved any one else," she whispered.

They floated back through the sweet dusk of the road and then through the streets where patches of magic light flickered from lamps and threw patterns of trees against house fronts.

After supper there was a gathering before the parlor fire. Jenny Lind's coming to the Meeting Street Theatre was discussed; and Mr. Sheldon continued a rambling and humorous account of a cracker's first visit to city relatives. He succeeded at one point in making even his wife forget herself to the extent of a chuckle; but she repented this lapse (certain of the details were a little too exciting for mixed company and after all the eve of Sunday was no time for hilarity) and repaid him by developing a series of long sighing yawns that dampened and finally extinguished his narrative. He retired into *The Southern Messenger* with a snort. Betty and Bob snatched the opportunity to retire to the library—"to look up," they naïvely explained, "the population of China." Nancy and Mark went out on the veranda to see the new moon over their left shoulders and to make a wish. The wish proved to be a lengthy one.

At last Martha Sheldon looked up from the Book of Job and remarked with tart impatience:

"How long is that girl going to keep Mark out there

in that freezing air. I wish she had stuck to her resolution to go home for a while."

Since this elicited no response from her husband, Martha struck a more personal note.

"Of course it's nothing to you if your eldest son takes pneumonia. You haven't even given a thought to how your younger sons are getting along their first night away from home."

"Has it ever occurred to you, my dear," Charles asked her, "that it is possible to think without speaking?"

He rose and said pleasantly: "Well, my dear, I think I'll run over to the Fenwicks for a little whist."

"I thought so."

"Well?"

"Oh, don't think about me. The children are all going out to the Mottes' dance and I'll be alone, but don't let that trouble you."

"Now, my dear, you have Diana for company and your Sunday-school lesson. And you can take a nice toddy before bed."

He went out into the hall. A moment later he called:

"Is there anything you wish Mark or me to do for you to-morrow at Malvern, my dear?"

"Mark or you? Is Mark going?"

"Mark is going out to see Nancy's father."

"Nancy's father? What about?"

"Now as to that, my dear, your guess is as good as mine."

Martha Sheldon's eyes squinted at the merry crackling flames of the fire. She looked at the Bible in her

lap. She stared at the Wedding of Pocahontas over the mantel. Then she called:

"Charles!"

There was the sound of the front door closing.

"He's gone," she told the andirons.

◆ IV ◆

MALVERN awoke with a throb of exceptional excitement that Christmas dawn of 1860. There was a quality of intense suspense in the sun that burned at last through cloud banks of the horizon and dissolved the mists that hung over the river and veiled gardens and lawns; and when full daylight came and the house, glistening with frost, shown forth in the greenery of magnolia and live-oak, there was a tingle in the air that was more than the tingle of Christmas. This day was more than Christmas: it was the celebration of the birth a few days before of the Ordinance of Secession, and the air seemed to echo still the ebullition of that high event—the salvoes of cannon, the bands leading impromptu parades, the shouting, the singing, the laughter.

Charles Sheldon stretched before the window, peered out through the frosty panes, thumped his chest, and gave vent to an enthusiastic snort; after which he turned his attention back to the washstand and then to the mirror, where he examined critically the results of the shave his servant had just given him. He brushed his jet black hair, twirled his jet black mustaches, and went about his dressing. At intervals he replied with brief snorts and yawning yes-my-dears to the steady stream of his wife's lament that poured over the screen at the foot of the bed.

"Christmas," Martha Sheldon was saying, her voice half muffled by drowsiness and the blankets that were

pulled up tight about her double chin, "is the Mass of Christ and not a deer-hunting festival."

"Yes, yes, my dear," Charles sighed as he put on his hunting vest and jacket, "we know all about that. But to-day we are celebrating the birthday of our new country."

"So much the more reason for church. But I suppose I shall be left to attend services alone again. I can't struggle any longer with my heathen family. How the neighbors must pity me—a husband and three sons but no one to squire me."

Charles came around to the side of the bed.

"My dear," he smiled, "all your neighbors' husbands and sons are coming here to hunt to-day. If you must spoil our Christmas by insisting on church—"

Martha put her hand over her exposed ear.

"Nancy and Betty are here to go with you," Charles laughed, "even though their husbands prefer to hunt. However, I'm sure Mark, who is so thoughtful and loving to his mother, would give up his sport and go with you if you but said the word. I'll speak to him on the subject."

"Charles," his wife snapped, "don't be a fool! It's not a habit of mine to impose on my family. Now please stop annoying me and go on downstairs—you've given me a headache already. Send Diana up with my coffee. And you better knock on every one's door. They were all up so late last night."

"Yes, my dear."

"And you better send me up a little medicine to settle my stomach. Hot rum seems to do the most good. And you'll have to send up Lake and Mabbie so that I can tell them about dinner. Oh, if I didn't have so

much responsibility on my shoulders, I might be able to keep my health. Sometimes I wonder whether they're my slaves or I'm theirs."

Charles Sheldon patted his wife on the cheek and planted a loud Christmas kiss on her forehead. But if he expected this to shield him from her inevitable parting shot, he was disappointed.

"Please remember," she told him with a sniff, "that too much Christmas cheer sets a bad example for the boys."

"Now, my dear, you leave that to me."

Charles closed the door before anything further could be said and walked lightly across the hall, humming:

God rest ye, merry gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay,
For Jesus Christ our Savior
Was born on Christmas day.

He entered the drawing-room, still chill despite the two roaring fires, saluted the portrait of Gilbert Sheldon, capered with an imaginary partner across the flower patterns of the Aubusson carpet and knocked at the door at the far end of the room.

"Merry Christmas, my dears!" he chuckled. "Nancy, will you release your husband from the nuptial couch that he may fare forth in quest of game?"

There was a mumble of sleepy voices and stifled laughter. Smiling to himself and wagging his head Charles Sheldon sashayed back across the drawing-room into the hall and mounted at a sprightly pace the stairs to the third floor. He arrived a little out of breath, knocked at the first door, and panted:

"Betty! Bob! Merry Christmas, my dears. South Carolina forever!"

Once again he was rewarded with sleepy laughter. He struck his crop against his boot with glee and crossed the hall to the door of the boys' room. Clearing his throat and composing his features into lines of suitable severity he rapped sharply.

"That you, Fod?" came Luke's voice.

"I'm very sure it's not Santa Claus," Charles Sheldon snapped. "If you young gentlemen intend hunting with us this morning, you better show some signs of life."

"I'm up and half dressed," John called.

There was a creaking of the bed. "I'm up too," Luke's strong voice called.

Mr. Sheldon pushed the door open. The boys were both in a state of naked surprise—Luke had just shed his nightshirt, and John was in the act of pulling an undershirt out of a bureau drawer.

"Merry Christmas, Fod," Luke said with a flushed grin.

Mr. Sheldon regarded his sons closely.

"Come along now," he said. "No dillydallying. You'll be late."

He closed the door and went downstairs, humming with great complacency. In the cold main hall he stopped at the railing that circled an opening to the basement hallway. Savory odors drifted up to his nostrils and peering down he could see the pots and kettles of steaming food that were being brought in from the kitchen-house. He walked on along the hall, his heels clicking on the marble, his crop flicking his boot. Between the doors of the living-room and the

dining-room he hesitated: the excited voices and laughter of his grandchildren called him on one hand; pulling him in the opposite direction was the sideboard and its decanters. He pushed open the living-room door.

"Ah, my little rabbits!"

They forgot their Christmas stockings and four of them made a little squealing rush for their grampa. Ned, the youngest, clung to his nurse; this was his first Christmas at Malvern and he was not yet used to this tall man that made strange sounds and lifted him high in the air. When grampa had tossed up David and Charlotte, the children of Mark and Nancy, and then Stephen and Bertie Cranston, he approached Ned, David's and Charlotte's baby brother. Ned clung to his nurse and screamed, and grampa had to be content with patting him on his fuzzy little head.

When grampa had seen and exclaimed over all the gifts that Santa Claus had brought and when he had once again patted all the little heads, he retired from the living-room, leaving instructions with the two nurses to take their charges up to see gramma as soon as they finished their stockings. He crossed the hall, entered the dining-room, and went to the sideboard, where he mixed and drank a glass of whiskey and bitters.

"Ah, fine! fine!" he said aloud; but it was not of the drink that he was thinking. There stirred through him an overwhelming feeling of well-being and satisfaction, in which were mingled his family, his house, his lands, his ancestors, and the old Chippendale table before him, gay with sprigs of holly and ropes of smilax round a centerpiece of mistletoe.

"Take your mistress a good breakfast," he told Lake who was putting the final touches to the table, "and a hot toddy."

He went out into the hall and turned to the river door. For a while he stood on the landing of the steps, smiling, twirling his mustaches, and rising contentedly on his toes as he surveyed the familiar scene. The streamers of moss that fell from the old live-oaks waved gently in the sea-scented wind that stirred up the river. The shrubs on the lawn and terrace were still jeweled with rime. Over all was a silence of silver and green and gold. From the Quarter came the sudden racket of fire-crackers.

Charles Sheldon descended to the path, where his two privileged hounds waylayed him and thrust their wet muzzles into his hands. They followed their master with wagging tails to the rose garden and solemnly watched him find and pluck with great care three crimson roses, the last of the year, one for each lady of the family.

After breakfast Charles Sheldon hurried to distribute the baskets of Christmas gifts to the hundreds of slaves that thronged at the foot of the river steps. From the driveway on the other side of the house came the notes of the horn and the joyous yowling of the hounds.

"Say, Mark," Luke said to his older brother, "John's got no business in this hunt. Tell him to stay home. He'll just get hurt. He's got the cracked notion that he can go anywhere I go."

"Come along with me, John," Mark smiled. "You've got to get your first deer to-day."

"He'll be lucky," Luke mocked, "if the deer don't get him."

"If your brains were as big as your mouth," John told him, "you'd be better off."

Mark listened with affectionate amusement to the wrangling that ensued between these two younger brothers for whom he felt an almost paternal regard. They still bickered like boys although they were fast becoming men. College had altered Luke only in making him physically firmer; several years before he had quite unexpectedly shot up to well over six feet and now he was filling out the hollows that such a stretching had left. For the rest he was the same: his dark brown mop of hair still eluded control; mirth and laughter came to his lips as readily as before; he still liked to move his arms and legs when he talked; enthusiasm continued to set fire to him, and his eyes, that so hated books, continued to look at the world with impertinent eagerness; his old jests were renewed and his charm went round like a spell. There was a mixture of good-will and healthy vanity in all that he did.

John, Mark thought, had been much changed by his first taste of college. He had become dreamier, moodier, more self-contained. There had never been much of Luke's spontaneity and light-heartedness about him; now he seemed more definitely than ever his brother's opposite—Luke was day, John was night. And yet it was only with Luke that he seemed at ease: with Luke his features—handsome, proud, and sensitive—lost the haunting vagueness that revealed a shy and introspective soul and he was capable

of loosing his tongue in banter or abuse or affection. Luke, Mark thought, is the only person he loves.

When the hunting party turned into the River Road from the avenue, Mark had Luke on his left and John on his right. They were listening, Luke open-mouthed, to the voice of their father, which drifted back strong from where he rode up ahead in the midst of his guests.

"Fight?" the voice was saying. "Damn it, sir, I'd like to think so! It would do me a lifetime of good, gentlemen, to have a crack at our two-faced, long-faced, holier-than-thou, tariff-hound, Yankee yahoo brothers. A lifetime of good, gentlemen."

The gentlemen laughed and applauded.

"But," the voice of Charles Sheldon concluded, "the whole truth of the matter is they haven't got the guts to fight."

There was more laughter and applause and other voices took up the refrain. Mark gave an inward sigh and rolled his tongue meditatively in his cheek. It was the same old thing. For years back, ever since he could remember, it had been like that about the Yankees, a crescendo of hate that had burst at last and split the Union in twain. Well, secession would bring the North to its senses, show it that the South could not be bullied and bled. But there could be no war: it would be too horrible.

A voice ahead was saying:

"And it was the bigotry-and-intolerance element in the Republican Party that elected Abe Lincoln, and Abe Lincoln is the South's worst enemy and that means war, by God!"

Mark exchanged glances with his brothers.

"Is there going to be war, Mark?" Luke gasped.

Mark shook his head.

"The old gentlemen get easily excited," he said.

"Shucks!" Luke frowned. "Think of the fun of hunting Yankees."

For a time they rode on in silence, each pursuing his own thoughts to the accompaniment of jangling bits, faintly squeaking saddles, and hoof treads muffled in the sandy road. Presently the party turned off into a side road that led to the wood trails.

Mark broke the silence:

"I guess you two bucks will have to go to a Southern college from now on."

"I sure hope so," Luke grinned. "Trouble with these Northern colleges is they're full of damn Yankees. I don't understand all about this tariff business but I sure do hate Yankees."

"I hate them too," John said. "I understand it all."

"You're so blasted wise," Luke told him.

"It's simple. Even you could understand it. It's this: there's no more reason why we shouldn't withdraw from the Union when we see that we're being exploited rather than benefited than there is why a man shouldn't withdraw from a business firm when he discovers that his associates are stealing the profits."

"Who told you all that?" Luke asked him.

"But," John continued, "the Yanks won't see it that way. Lincoln will try to keep us from going into business for ourselves."

"He can't do it!" Luke blurted out. "But, Lord, I hope he tries."

Mark reined in his horse Trump.

"We'll have to go single file now," he said. "They're cutting into the woods up ahead."

Luke fell in behind Mark, and John brought up the rear. Luke turned in his saddle.

"Cut it out, now," he said to John. "I'm not going to have you on my heels—you with a loaded rifle. Some day I'm going some place where I won't have you always tagging around after me. Cut it out, now."

"Where do you want me to get?" John said.

"Anywhere but behind me."

Up ahead there was a sudden moment of alertness on the part of huntsmen and dogs. Even the horses seemed to sense to the full the breathless excitement and to tense their flanks and necks. Then all at once the chase was on, and for Mark and Luke and John all extraneous thoughts were lost in the single purpose of the hunt. They rode together for several minutes straight through the pineland, sun-patched and still, but as the pursuit led them to the eerie fingers of the swampwoods, Mark and John missed Luke.

Mark led the way to the right, checking his pace so that John could keep up.

"Stick close," Mark called over his shoulder. "We'll see if we can cut him off from the river."

"I'm coming," John shouted.

They came soon to a stand near the riotous tangle of greenery near the river bank, dismounted, and tied their horses. They had scarcely settled themselves when the deer, a fine buck, jumped almost over their heads. Mark held his own fire and called to John, but before John could level his gun, the stag was gone —stiffly erect, snowy tail flashing high above the bay bushes.

Mark chaffed his brother good-naturedly, but when he saw how crestfallen John was he tried to cheer him with words of comfort.

"That was a hard shot," he said.

"If I could only get a deer," John murmured, "just to show Luke."

They sat awaiting the coming of the dogs. They were far behind their quarry, but at last they came clamoring up. In the lead was Luke's pet, a hound of doubtful lineage, barking noisily. The aristocrats of the pack came last, pausing to make sure of the scent and vent skyward their perfect music.

When the pack had passed, Mark called John to the horses. They mounted in haste, and Mark turned Trump's head off to the right on the chance that the buck might circle that way. But soon they knew that their stalwart prey had outwitted them, had entered the mysterious depths of the woods, and was lost. They spent the next hour trying to locate the pack and the other hunters. They had worked their way well back from the river and were nearing the highroad when Mark called an abrupt halt. He listened intently for a moment, then wheeled Trump and plunged off to the left, shouting to John:

"Here's your chance!"

They raced again, John following with shuddering eyes, expecting at any instant that his horse would stumble. The next few minutes whirled by with the defiant recklessness of a dream. He could not feel the branches that scratched his face and tore at his clothes, and he was not aware until he had stopped, dismounted, and taken position by Mark in a new stand that his hat was gone and that warm trickles were

moving down the bridge of his nose and hanging on his eyelashes.

"Be ready!" Mark whispered.

John wiped his hand across his forehead. He put his fingers to the trigger of his gun, feeling a little dizzy. Then there they suddenly were—two stags—sailing slowly before him. He took aim and fired. After that there was a blur of blood which he kept wiping away, and exciting flashes. He was standing over the fallen stag, and Mark's voice was saying things. The dogs came in a tumult and after them horses and men: faces were pressing in from all about, and everything was a babble of sound; hands were gripping his hand with laughter. Luke's face stood out clear, shining eyes and mocking smile, and Luke's voice came very close:

"Don't think I believe you did it." Then: "Say, how did you manage to get yourself so scratched up, half-wit?"

John felt himself being lifted off his feet; hands were gripping his wrists and ankles and he was being carried and then lowered. He closed his eyes tight as the hands turned him over in the bed of entrails. His face was being plunged into the bloody mass and he gasped and cried out for breath. . . .

He was on his feet again, wiping his face with his coat sleeves and trying to smile at the circle of laughing faces. Luke's voice was saying close to his ear:

"Buck up."

His own voice was trying to say: Luke, I feel a little dizzy.

He was falling gently forward into Luke's arms, and Luke was saying from far off:

"The poor fool's fainted!"

Then there were pleasant colored lights that dropped down and down with little whizzing noises. . . .

John opened his eyes with a sigh.

"Well, my son," some one was saying, "feeling better?"

It was his father standing over him, smiling down.

John nodded sheepishly.

"He's all right now," he heard his father chuckle. "Let's move on."

John closed his eyes again. Then he opened them just enough to see out. The men were beginning to ride off. He wished they would hurry. He wanted to sit up but he felt too ashamed. He caught a glimpse of Luke moving restlessly around with his hands in his pockets. The others were riding away, so he opened his eyes and sat up.

"Luke," he whispered.

"Where you been, baby?" Luke asked him.

John flushed. He got up and looked around. The others were out of sight now. The deer was gone, too; there was only a little blood on the leaves to mark the place.

"How do you feel, baby?" Luke asked.

"Hell, I'm all right," John told him shakily.

"Well, come on then. Let's catch up with them. Mark's taken your stag and gun. They left me to play nurse to you, of course. Honestly, you're the damnedest nuisance."

"I'm sure sorry," John said in a very low voice.

"A lot of good that does. What I want to know is can you stay on a horse?"

"I'm all right now. Except this cut on my forehead keeps bleeding."

Luke's hands bound a handkerchief around John's head with rough and clumsy care. Then they untied the horses and boosted John into his saddle.

Malvern met the returning huntsmen with bright fires and bowls of steaming punch.

"Gentlemen"—Charles Sheldon's voice carried up the stairs to where his wife was listening over the banister—"I give you the Sovereign State of South Carolina."

"Now what are they shouting about?" Martha remarked to Diana. "They'll stay here drinking for an hour and dinner will be ruined and of course I'll be blamed. And all their filthy boots on my fine carpets."

Some one was coming upstairs.

"John!" she gasped when she saw who it was. She tried to say: They've murdered you!—but her voice failed her.

"I got a stag!" John shouted. "And they dipped me. I've got to change my clothes."

Martha recovered her speech:

"The carpets!"

"It's all dry now," John said, showing her with his finger.

"Oh!" she sighed. "I feel so faint. Brandy. Quick."

She tottered against Diana. John dashed downstairs and came back with a glass of brandy, which the imperturbable Diana applied to her fainting mistress's lips. Martha opened her eyes.

"John," she said feebly, "never frighten your poor mother like that again. Go quickly, dear, and change those gory clothes. My stars!"

John went, and Martha allowed Diana to give her the rest of the brandy. Then she returned to the rail and listened to the jumble of voices and laughter that drifted up from the living-room. She realized that she no longer felt impatient with the voices; now they were pleasant like leaves rustling in the wind, swirling up now and again in little gusts of laughter, in which she would liked to have joined. She had forgotten dinner, and she was sorry when the guests departed with their high spirits.

She began the long journey downstairs—a pause for breath on each step—Diana backing down ahead to prevent the forward plunge that was Martha Sheldon's greatest terror. At the foot of the stairs her husband met her and offered his arm. Mark offered another arm, and thus buttressed she proceeded to her end of the table, where Luke held her chair.

"One of you boys go call Nancy and Betty," she directed when she had been lowered into her place. "I told them not to take the children down to the pond. If my knees get any weaker, I won't be able to move out of my room. Some one light the candles and close the blinds—I can't enjoy Christmas dinner by daylight. Charles, pour me a thimble of tonic. I'm all out of breath."

Martha sighed comfortably as she settled back in her chair and surveyed the groaning table.

Twilight came long before dinner was over. The children were brought in to see the plum pudding with its flaming sauce, and all were full of wonder and excitement except little Ned, who cried so hard that Nancy had to take him upstairs. When the blue flames

had flickered out and the wonder was over and the children had been passed all around for good-night kisses, Luke rode David upstairs on his back and hurried down for his pudding and madeira. Madeira meant manhood. The decanter was not passed to John. He was a minor. . . . Luke sipped his drink very slowly for John's benefit.

After dinner Charles Sheldon lighted the candles on the green and red branches of the holly tree in the living-room, while Lake and Jim stood by with emergency jugs of water. The children appeared once again, this time in their night-gowns, and gathered about their grandmother's chair by the fire for the singing of the Christmas carols. Grandfather raised his hands for silence and launched into the first.

Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn king,
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinner reconciled.

Martha's Sheldon's voice mingled fervently with the voices of her children, her grandchildren, the two black nurses, and Lake and Jim. Charles Sheldon's voice burst from a face that grew more and more purple as he strained to keep his position of leadership in the choir.

It came upon a midnight clear—

Charles was compelled to relinquish the leadership to Lake in this second carol and was not able to hold his own even with Bob Cranston. But he came back strong on the next:

Oh, little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie.

And surpassed himself on the last:

Hark, hark, my soul!
Angelic strains are swelling.

Although this last was not strictly a Christmas carol, it was Charles's favorite hymn and he included it always. Then there was the *Gather Round the Christmas Tree* song for the children, and they were packed off to bed. They were followed very soon by their grandmother, who complained that the third helping of oyster stuffing had unsettled her.

Luke and John set to work with Lake and Jim to move things out of the way for the dances.

"I been thinking," Luke said to his brother as they moved chairs back against the wall, "about going in town to-morrow so as to be all ready to enlist the minute the Yanks start trouble—such as moving from Fort Moultrie to Fort Sumter, which Bob says they're going to do."

"I been thinking the same thing," John said.

Luke paused in his labors to straighten up and frown.

"Now listen," he said with slow emphasis. "You're not going to do anything of the kind. You're too young."

"They take them in younger than me."

"Stop talking about it. Don't get your mind set on it, because you're not going to enlist—that's all."

Luke kicked a rug back toward the wall.

"Well anyway," John said, "I'm going in to town."

Luke jerked a chair across the floor in exasperation. "Why do you have to come tagging after me every place I go? Will you answer me that one question?"

"I want to see what's going on as much as you do."

"Are you two at it again?" Mark smiled at them on his way to the hall.

Nancy was coming downstairs.

"I brought down my shawl," she said as she took his arm, "so that we could go out for a peep at the moon."

Outside on the steps she gave a little shiver. The risen moon cast a silver glamor over the world.

"It's so cold and white," she said, giving his arm a squeeze. "Let's go down to the river and come back through the gardens."

They went down the terrace path arm in arm, Nancy laughing about the children. But Ned was such a cry-baby. Neither of Betty's children were like that. However, he'd grow out of it in time. Why was Mark so quiet?

"Why, I'm listening to you, honey," he smiled.

"Mark, I can tell there's something on your mind."

He managed a laugh. "Not a thing, dear."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

She looked at him for several moments in silence. They walked on through the old summer-house, between the butterfly lakes where stars bathed, to the edge of the river. Mists hung like clouds over the rice-fields, and the dim gleaming tide lapped at the wharf piers as it slid by.

◈ V ◈

LUKE snored, but John could not get to sleep. Every time that he got himself comfortable and drowsy the thought of Mark and Bob at Fort Moultrie and Major Anderson in Fort Sumter would come flashing back and he would be awake in an instant. Once he had seen Mark and Major Anderson talking in the street down by the Sheldon & Blakesley warehouses, laughing and joking like old friends and parting with a handclasp. Now they were going to try to blow each other up. That was what war was. Luke, sleeping here by his side so peacefully, might soon start up toward the north to meet and rip at the guts of some youth coming south—perhaps Ward Ellis from Princeton. Strange and horrible; but that was what war was. Strange and horrible and exciting, so exciting that you could hardly breathe when you thought of it.

John's thoughts went whirling off round the city, the harbor, the forts, and out to Malvern. Then he was at the St. Cecilia ball and Luke was waltzing with that Branton girl, waltzing faster and faster. The people were gasping. Stop Luke. Faster and faster. Oh, but stop him! . . . People were screaming now, running away, pouring out of doors, out of windows. Luke and the Branton girl spinning furiously, so fast that they were blended into a top. Luke! . . .

John's eyes were open, staring into the darkness. He slipped out of bed dazed and scarcely conscious of the

sweat that dampened his night-shirt, tottered to the open window, and clambered out onto the upper veranda. Over the dim roofs of the houses and over the glowing chasms of the streets from somewhere off in the darkness the boom of a cannon brought a slight jarring thud. Cold stillness welled up from the garden and made his ears ache as he listened. The whole hushed town seemed to be listening. The beating of his heart was the only sound in all this pressure of silence. The lamp in the street beyond the garden wall spluttered. In the house next door a window flew open and a night-capped head appeared, looked round, listened, and disappeared. Somewhere there was the tread of hurrying feet on the sidewalk. In the harbor a ship's bell tolled faintly.

John rubbed his night-shirt to warm himself. Inside he could hear Luke moving around and he climbed back through the window into the room. Luke had lighted the lamp and half asleep was pulling on his militia uniform.

"Did you hear it?" John asked him in a tense whisper as he grabbed his own clothes.

"What are you fixing to do?" Luke blinked at his brother.

"Going with you."

Luke shook his touseled head. "No, you're not. That's the midnight signal for the militia to form. Go on back to bed, John."

"Please, Luke. I won't get in the way. I just want to see."

"There's nothing to see. The fun won't start before dawn. Then you can go to the Battery with Fod and

the rest. Get back under the covers before you catch cold."

John dropped his clothes back on the chair and got into bed. With a lump in his throat he watched his brother finish dressing and blow out the lamp. The door opened and closed in the darkness, and Luke was gone.

It did no good to strive to go to sleep; that was as futile as striving to fall in love or striving to be happy. You had to forget yourself. But that was impossible, for the minute you closed your eyes you saw yourself hurrying, hurrying to the Battery. . . . It would be no fun going with the family: in the first place, the women would never get started. As for stopping at the Pringles' or the Ransoms', that would cause a delay. Best to be alone if you couldn't be with Luke. With Luke. . . .

John sat up in bed with a start. Another jarring boom like some one thumping down a roll of carpet in the attic overhead. He sprang out on the cold floor, and stumbled to the window, reaching for his clothes as he passed the chair. Beyond the roofs of the houses out over the harbor a graceful arc of fire rose and fell like a skyrocket.

He panted into his clothes and ran downstairs. In the hall he struck a light and peered up at the face of the clock: twenty minutes past six, it said with absurd calmness. He dashed out the front door and ran south toward the Battery, through a blur of lighted windows. All around him in the semi-darkness were the sounds of hurrying feet and the broken exclamations of voices.

Already people were swarming on the Battery, their heads and shoulders silhouetted against the growing light of the horizon, the roar of their voices rising with each shell that arched its fiery back against the dark upper sky and burst in a shower of stars over the black shape of Sumter. Little crescendos of excitement swept over the crowd like gusts of rain. It seemed to John as ecstasy tingled up his spine that he was viewing some strange kind of thunder storm.

A smoky rose color was beginning to spread up the sky. The mass of people was beginning to separate into individuals. John looked about him for familiar faces; but there was only the bushy eyebrows and walrus mustache of Mr. Piluski, who kept a dry-goods store on King Street, and the squinting eyes of Mrs. Piluski, who looked like a squaw. Mr. Piluski was as usual lighting his big pipe. He was always lighting it and with great flaming puffs that threatened to singe his mustache but somehow never did; it went out almost immediately, which seemed to be what its owner desired. A few minutes would be allowed to pass and then he would light it again. John hesitated to open a conversation with Mr. Piluski, but he was bursting—he had to talk to some one.

"Well, Mr. Piluski," he said in a voice that was husky with suppressed excitement, "reckon it's started now."

Mr. Piluski twisted his thick neck to see who was addressing him.

"Ah, dot you, huh, Meester Sheldon?" he smiled broadly. "Yes, yes, it bee-gun now. Vell, dey drive us to it!" He regarded his pipe with a guttural little laugh. "Your brudder, Capdain Sheldon, is he in Ford Mouldrie, huh?"

"Mark's been there for three days," John said, looking across the iridescent harbor. "Luke's with the militia somewhere."

Mr. Piluski nodded pleasantly.

"Your brudder Mark," he smiled, "is a fine man. I hope he vouldn't get killed. How is your mamma?"

A shell exploded in the dark shape of Fort Sumter, and Mr. Piluski took the pipe out of his mouth and stared with mild amazement. Then he beamed at his wife and John.

"Ve're gettin' de aim," he explained.

John started to say something, but his voice was drowned in the great shout that rose from the crowd. And then quite suddenly the first red rays of the sun came quivering over Sullivan's Island and stained the thronged seawall. A moment later a tiny flag was seen to climb slowly above Fort Sumter, and a hush fell on the crowd. Over the water the frail note of a bugle trembled. A little puff of smoke preceded the Yankees' first gun. The roar of voices on the Battery burst forth again.

"Ah-ha!" grunted Mrs. Piluski.

"Dot," said Mr. Piluski, "settles it. My boy"—he put a pudgy hand on John's shoulder—"your brudders vill be leavin' for Wirginia directly. Vell, Minnie, ve should go home and get coffee and come back. It ain't too varm dese cold mornings. Vell, sir, good-by, my boy."

After they were gone, John began to realize that he was cold. The sun was still far too weak to temper the chill April air. He thrust his hands into his pockets and began to move through the jostling, tumultuous crowd. All classes of the town were here, mingling

and exchanging exclamations, nervousnesses, and smiles. It was as if all Charleston were on a holiday; only a few faces bore traces of fear. It was a glorious day.

John avoided familiar faces now. He wanted to find Luke, to talk with Luke. Somewhere a fife and drum corps was playing, and John worked his way in that direction through the crowds and the press of carriages; but it was only a company of county volunteers trying vainly to break a path to the Battery. He hurried along East Battery toward the Sheldon & Blakesley warehouses. The crowd was thinner here in the street, but the roofs were thick with people. He could go up on the warehouse roof. No; there was something much more important than watching to be done. Luke and Mark were going to Virginia—it was sure now. The Charleston Light Dragoons would be the first to leave.

He half walked, half ran on to Broad Street. The barracks door was open, and he went in. Over by a window of the long, high room some men in uniform were sitting round a table. John approached them hesitatingly. Several of the men he knew. Colonel Barnwell was there smoking a cheroot, and he seemed the one to speak to.

"I was looking for Luke Sheldon, sir," he explained in a hollow voice.

"'Morning, John," the Colonel smiled. "Luke's company moved out to Moultrie before daybreak. Anything I can do for you?"

"Why, yes, sir. Is it true that the regiment's going to leave for Virginia to-morrow?"

Colonel Barnwell exchanged a glance of amusement with his companions.

"Well, John, I don't know about to-morrow, but I reckon it might be the day after to-morrow."

Some one laughed, and John flushed. His mouth felt very dry.

"Well then, sir," he said, "I can't wait any longer to enlist."

The Colonel blew a smoke wreath.

"How old are you, John?"

"Nineteen, sir. Is that all right?"

"A little young. But are you sure you're nineteen?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you shoot straight?"

"I shot a stag last Christmas."

The Colonel chuckled, took a sheet of paper out of the table drawer, and motioned John to draw up a chair.

◈ VI ◈

JOHN put his arm over his eyes to keep out the sun that filtered in blinding little flashes through the leaves of the trees. There was hardly a breath of air stirring, and no clouds floated above the branches to offer respite from the stifling July heat. He was afraid that if he stayed in that position any longer, exhaustion and the heavy torpor of the day might lull him off to sleep despite the tension of his nerves. He turned over on his stomach.

He looked to the right and to the left at the irregular line of his comrades resting at the foot of the wooded slope. Right next to him on one side was the tow-headed boy from the Cooper River plantation, Tom Fielding his name was, and he was leaning on his elbows looking hard into space as if he were trying to see all the way from Virginia to South Carolina. On the other side was the place where Luke had been —Corporal Luke, gone scouting with Captain Travis up the hill. Beyond the empty space was Castro, the fat Portuguese Jew, sitting on his haunches chewing something that looked like a smoked herring. When he saw that John was looking at him, he smiled and offered to pull off a piece. John shook his head and turned his face to the ground, making a pillow of his arm. From somewhere along the line came laughter. That was Pete Coleman. He would be laughing in hell. God!—were none of these others quivering inside? They all looked as unconcerned as if they were

waiting to play a game of tag. Tom Fielding was white; but he was always white.

"Warm, ain't it?" Castro said in an oily whisper, licking his fingers. His thick, muculent voice seemed to make the air more stifling.

John grunted. The pungent scent of pine needles and leaf mold filled his nostrils. The sweltering air, like the breath of an oven, seemed to wilt all sound; only the pawing and chafing of the tethered horses survived.

From somewhere off in the direction of Manassas Junction came the faint short thunder of a cannon. Would McDowell's grand Federal army, which Lincoln and Scott had groomed, cut through Beauregard's thin, raw ranks and march on in triumph to Richmond? . . . John felt that he was back in Charleston, waking up in a bath of sweat from vivid dreams to hear the unreal boom of cannon over the harbor. Looking back on what had passed since that morning it was hard to separate dreaming from waking: the two were like the sky and sea when on certain days you couldn't tell where the dividing line of the horizon came. The last days in Charleston and at Malvern; the farewell balls with only a few civilian clothes mixed in with the uniforms and the swirling hoop-skirts; the long, jerking, jarring train journey to Richmond with a little reception at each way station; the detraining of the horses and the encampment on the outskirts of the city; the long weeks of drilling broken by brief hours of gayety; and then orders to the front;—all those were pictures in a dream. And now this hillside in bright burning sunlight, with the fabulous enemy on the other side, was equally fanciful. The past weeks

were whimsies of sleep that must very soon now snap and tumble him back into reality. . . . He dug his fingers deep into the mold. Here—at last—he and war were going to meet, face to face. But it was incredible; and then abruptly he found himself looking out of the corner of his mind's eye at a vague image. No, he told the image, I'm not scared. It's just that I can't wait. . . . What would Luke say? Or Mark? He could see Mark again as he had last seen him, talking to Colonel Wade Hampton in front of a tent. Hello, Mark!—but he hadn't dared, of course, to really call out. Pity you couldn't hail your own brother when there was no telling when you'd see him again. Mark—it was hard to think of him leading a plunging cavalry charge. It was all make-believe, all this phantasmagoria of war and agony and death. It was all a dream. It had to be a dream. Otherwise it made no sense. It was too much to believe in. For all the plausible setting of men and landscape this was a dream, madly exciting and vivid, but a dream, a dream. . . .

The crack of twigs made John open his eyes. Luke was coming down the hill, half running, half sliding. He went along the line to where Lieutenant Boykin was leaning against a tree and told him something with quick gestures. Lieutenant Boykin bent down and whispered something to the men near him. The message began to spread along the line from mouth to ear, but before it reached John, Luke had come back to his place. John looked at him expectantly.

"Pass the word along," Luke said into his brother's ear, "to start up the hill when Boykin gives the signal."

John turned to Tom Fielding and repeated the words in a voice that he tried to make sound as cool as Luke's.

Then he turned back to Luke and kept his eyes on Luke's face.

"Watch Boykin's sword," Luke told him.

John tried to watch the sword, but his eyes kept coming back to Luke.

"Are you all fixed for them?" Luke smiled.

John tried to smile. "All fixed," he whispered and bit his lip to prevent Luke seeing that it trembled.

Luke was getting up. The whole line was getting up.

"Keep your carbine slung over your shoulder," Luke warned, "till we get to the fence at the top of the hill. And keep off my heels."

John nodded. Scrambling up the slippery slope he wondered if his wobbly legs would ever carry him to the top.

Somehow he was behind the fence and passing on the order that came along the line to keep low. Between the rails he could see that the sun was pouring down on a placid, sleepy-looking plain, that there were no trees on the other slope of the hill, that there was a dusty road at the foot, and that there were men in blue coming along the road in a column. At the head of the column was a man on a black horse. As the faces of the marchers became more distinct, John could see that some were talking and laughing.

Luke's voice whispered: "If they charge us—what's left of them—you get back, hear? Don't try to show off."

John nodded because there was something in his throat that left no passage for words and almost stopped his breath.

The captain's sword was up. Luke's trigger clicked

back. John rested his barrel on the middle rail of the fence and cocked the trigger. But—he felt a little twitch of laughter in his stomach—this wasn't real. He wouldn't aim at the horse anyway. The captain's sword was down. . . .

When the smoke lifted, the man on horseback was gone. The horse was tottering on its knees as if it were trying to lie down. There were wide gaps in the column and the men that were left standing were motionless as if they, too, were considering lying down. Then there were hoarse shouts, and little puffs of smoke curled up from the road.

"Keep your head down!" Luke's voice. "Load—quick!"

I didn't aim at the horse, John told himself. Nor any of them.

They were coming up the slope—scrambling, shouting, some falling, but groups of them coming on, coming on. Luke was firing and loading and firing. The hill was crackling with rifle fire like a pile of burning brush. A numbness gripped John's arms and senses.

"Fire—quick!" Luke yelled.

John pushed the muzzle of his carbine between the rails. Out in the sunlight was the figure of a young man coming up. He was almost at the crest of the hill. There was a bayonet on the end of his rifle, and his mouth was open in a shout. John aimed at his blue breast and fired. The young man went toppling over backwards.

"You don't have to wait till you see the whites of their eyes," Luke grinned.

John loaded mechanically and thrust the muzzle out again. But there was no one there now. Only the young man trying to get up. He managed to roll over on his side and then over on his stomach and tried to get up from that position. He seemed to be surprised that he couldn't. He looked toward the fence once, drowsy-eyed. A stream of blood gushed from his lips and that seemed to surprise him too. John closed his eyes, feeling a sudden desire to vomit.

Luke was gripping his arm. "Come on, boy. That's all there is to that."

John got to his feet. Down in the road a few blues were standing irresolute. A second later they were running back the way they had come, leaving behind them in the road and on the slope of the hill the majority of their comrades. The young man on the other side of the fence was still looking surprised.

The troop crossed fields, forded Bull Run, crossed more fields, skirted woods, and came out at last on a wagon road.

"Well," Luke smiled as the horses settled down to a trot, "how did you like it?"

"All right," John said. The carbine slung over his shoulder kept giving him reminding little thumps. He adjusted his revolver holster and his saber and avoided meeting Luke's eyes.

"You sound right enthusiastic," Luke said, flicking a ruffle of lather from his mount's neck. "And you don't look much paler than a ghost."

"I'm hungry," John told him. Castro in the squad ahead was chewing on something again.

"Shucks! What do you want to eat for when you can fight? If you're really hungry here's a biscuit." Luke reached into his saddle-bag.

John discovered that he wasn't hungry after all. The biscuit tasted as dry as sawdust, but he made himself choke it down.

"That was a great ambush," Luke was saying. "They walked right into it with their eyes open. It was like having a whole herd of deer walk by your stand."

"I thought it would be more like—a charge," John said. "More . . . even."

"You'll get to like it after a while, even or uneven. Once you get mad—"

Luke laughed toward the burning sky. From the north came the booming of artillery.

"I wonder where we're going," John said.

"We're skirting around to join Hampton's Legion again," Luke told him. "Then you may get a charge or two."

For what seemed to John hours they rode along the wagon-road, breaking the steady trot with a gallop or a walk now and then. The artillery was slowly growing nearer. With the setting of the sun the air grew cooler, and Captain Travis kept the troop at a fast trot.

"If we don't hurry," Luke complained, "we'll miss the whole show."

It was dusk when they reached the battle-field. The grand Federal army was on its way back to Washington in a vast rout, leaving the victors in disorder almost as complete. It took Captain Travis many minutes to trace out Hampton's bivouac in the chaos of men and bodies and equipment.

John followed Luke in a daze. There were faces around a flaming camp-fire, and one of them was Mark's. The faces were talking excitedly. John tried to catch what they were saying, but there were too many troopers in the way. Luke was gone; nearby were Castro and Tom Fielding, with his mouth open.

"What are they saying?" John shouted at Castro.

"Talking about chasing the Yanks," Castro shouted back. "The infantry is too green, so maybe we got to do it."

A few moments later Luke came out of the confusion. Mark was with him.

"How are you getting along?" Mark smiled at his younger brother.

"He's in a trance," Luke said to Mark. "Went to sleep in the middle of our ambush and I had to wake him up to shoot a boy who was going to lay him out with a bayonet. God knows what he'd look like in a real battle."

John tried to smile, but he saw that Mark's smile was gone, that he was frowning.

"John," Mark said, "some of us are going to follow up the retreat. Luke will be going and some of the others from your troop, but I want you to stay out."

John nodded. Mark was walking away. His shadow mingled with the host of giant distorted shadows that flashed across the tents and the trees beyond. John looked around. Luke was getting into his saddle; so were Captain Travis, Boykin, Castro, and most of the others. John ran across to Luke.

"Luke. I've got to go. Everybody's going."

"No, they're not either. Watch out now. You heard what Mark told you."

Captain Travis and the others started off. John held on to Luke's leg.

"Luke! I'm obliged to go."

"Let go. Don't be a fool. This is one time you stay behind."

Luke kicked his leg free and spurred his horse. His shadow sped brokenly across the tents after the others. For a moment John hesitated. Then he ran to his horse, swung into the saddle, and followed Luke into the darkness. At first as the cavalcade galloped past camp-fire after camp-fire John kept some distance behind, but when the last bivouacs and gun-stacks were past, he caught up with the hindmost riders. Luke was on up ahead. The pale light of the new moon made riding a little easier, but there were treacherous ditches in the fields that they hurried across. It was a relief to reach a turnpike.

At a cross-road the troop separated. John could see Mark on his horse Trump at the head of the detachment that turned off to the right. Luke was with the detachment that was going straight ahead, and John followed them. Gradually he worked his way up nearer Luke. Luke's bare head was just in front now. Tom Fielding was next to John.

"Where'd you drop from?" Tom's drawling voice asked.

"They tried to leave me behind," John answered quickly and in a low voice, hoping that Luke would not hear.

"Can't afford to leave any of the cavalry behind. We're the boys that's got to do the follyin' up and harassin'."

John said nothing to this, but he thought of the

alloping troops of cavalry following up and harassing he fleeing Yanks all along the line. Harassing meant aber work. Well, that would be easier to do in dim noonlight than sending a slug into a man's chest at en yards in broad daylight. It all seemed more plausble now that it was night. Victory! That part was vonderful.

Where were the poor fleeing wretches? There was o sight of them yet, and no sound but the trillings f insects and the quick thunder of hoofs on a little ridge over a stream. If they didn't come into view retty soon, the horses would be winded. They were anting even now as the road led up a slight incline n a cut.

"We must be almost up to them," Tom Fielding aid.

Tom Fielding's face was screeching out to a deafening, blinding crash. The slope-tops were bursting with ire and smoke. Up ahead a horse was rearing in the wan light. A near horse, Tom Fielding's, was toppling ver. Then all was mingled in one turmoil of horses, men, noise. . . .

John knew that he was standing by his fallen horse. For an instant he saw clearly. The cut was a caldron in which a seething mass of men and horses writhed to escape. And somewhere there was Luke. John fought his way to the spot where he had last seen his brother. Luke was on the ground, one leg pinned under his dead horse. John worked frantically to free the leg.

"John!" Luke's scream was almost lost in the din. "Go back! Why did you come? Go back!"

It was all bewildering lightning and thunder. They

were in the ditch stumbling through the dimness back down out of the cut. Something was the matter with Luke. He was on his knees with his head bent forward. John turned back and shook him. He gripped him by the shoulders and began to drag him along the ditch. At the foot of the cut he lifted him and carried him away from the murderous road into the woods. . . .

The reconnoitering party that came out several hours later found that the ambuscade had moved on and that the road at the cut was choked with the bodies of men and horses. They were able in the moonlight to identify most of the dead and disentangle the wounded.

On the following morning scouts came upon John Sheldon in a field near Bull Run. He was sitting under a tree, holding in his arms the body of his brother. When they asked him questions, he seemed unable to answer. They brought him and the body back to the encampment of Hampton's Legion and turned them over to Captain Mark Sheldon.

◈ VII ◈

AFTER Luke's death war became easier for John. It was still a nightmare: a bedlam of guns, horses, and men; of endless marches and camps; of sickness and dying in monotonous patterns of horror; a meaningless jumble of men's ideals riding the winds of their passions like bewildered autumn leaves; of sentimentality and callousness, pettiness and courage, stinks, laughter, eyes, tears, blood. It was still a nightmare, but now it seemed natural to be bad-dreaming. It must never stop. For at intervals in the fever of weariness and waiting came the purging fire of battle, the yelling dash of the charge, the clash of hand-to-hand combat, the thrust and slash of saber into flesh, the sighting with revolver or carbine at torsos in blue. And here was temporary ease for the heart torn by a wound that would not heal, that kept whispering the name of Luke.

The grim months burned themselves out and deepened infinitesimally the pale ashes of the years. The fierce flames of Seven Pines, Antietam, and Chancellorsville had flared and died; the agony of Gettysburg was passed and Grant's blood festival at Cold Harbor. Lee was making his last stand at Petersburg, and summer was ripening softly into autumn.

September brought Mark and John together after a separation of more than a year. As they sat on a cot in Mark's tent scrutinizing each other behind words that faltered despite all that pressed to rush out, Mark

hardly recognized his younger brother. His whole appearance was changed; he seemed to have grown taller and to have abruptly matured. Lieutenant John Sheldon was gaunt, tanned, and hard. In his eyes, in his voice, and in his bearing was something, it seemed to Mark, that had been Luke's. It was as if some part of Luke's spirit had passed over into John and fused to form a being that was neither John nor Luke but both.

One day in mid-September General Hampton led a raiding party to secure a large herd of cattle that the enemy had congregated at a point on the James River. It was a venture of importance, for Lee's army was facing starvation. Success was won after the most savage skirmishing. Among those who gave their lives in exchange for the desperately needed meat was Major Mark Sheldon.

John Sheldon was brought back to the Richmond hospital with two saber gashes in his head and a mangled left arm. When the arm had been amputated and the head wounds sewed, it was uncertain whether the youthful lieutenant would live or die. It remained uncertain for days, but at last he began slowly to mend. The flickering shadows of delirium gave way to steady burning fever, and the fever cooled to the long, aching days of healing.

October's nimble frosts skipped over the trees and gardens of doomed Richmond, pinching leaves to crimson and gold, extinguishing the glowing colors of flowers. November came in with brisk, mocking sunlight, but went away mourning with bleak rains the dying world. December, a philosopher in gray, stood musing over the desolation.

John reached Charleston the Saturday before Christmas. He had made the journey from Virginia on Mark's horse Trump by slow, painful stages, accompanied by Jim, whom Mark had taken to the front as a body-servant. Jim had walked the entire way; it had been impossible to get any sort of mount for him. Through a country stripped of almost everything and swarming with bands of starving, half-naked deserters, the two had worked their course south, begging and foraging for food, sleeping sometimes in barns and sheds, often in the open, seldom in houses.

Charleston was a place of ghosts. St. Michael's chimes, voice of the town, were hushed; they had been taken down and sent off to Columbia for safe keeping. The path of the great fire that had swept across the town three winters before lay like a scar from the Cooper to the Ashley. The streets, except for a last hectic flush of life round the railroad shops and the upper reaches of the waterfront, were almost deserted. The few people that were abroad hurried with haunted eyes through the December light under a sky vague with clouds. It was hard to believe that in these same streets the wild rejoicings of Secession had echoed.

John went first to the eastern waterfront. The warehouses were closed, the wharves empty. A pall hung over the lifeless harbor. Blockade-running was over. Everything was over. . . . He left Trump with Jim at the pitiable marketplace and walked on alone toward the Battery. Instinctively his steps carried him along Church Street, past St. Philip's with its wrecked chancel, across Broad, and on along Church between shuttered windows and barred doors. Tall weeds and grass grew in the silent street, and here and there the side-

walk was blocked with piles of debris. Some of the houses gaped with shell-wounds; others were gutted by fire. He walked on numbly. . . .

The house that had been town home was gone. There were mounds of bricks and charred timbers where it and its neighbors had stood. Most of that block was gone. He stood looking dully at the spot. Dimly he wondered why he felt no stir of sorrow. Had despair stunned sensibility to all lesser griefs? Was he proof now against all emotion save that one overwhelming sense of hopelessness? A sudden dizziness rushed over him. The street reeled and he closed his eyes to steady it. He sat weakly down on the curb and buried his face in his lone hand. Under his thumb he could feel the throb of the scar that ran down from his scalp. If that wound had cut down into his brain severing the cords of memory, it would have been a blessing. No, not all of memory; only the memories, hideous and heart-searing, of the four years; leaving those other earlier memories alive and pulsing. Sitting here with closed eyes it was possible to move among those earlier ones: to see the house and the city and the life of the city as they had been in that winter that seemed so long ago; to be back at Malvern among dear faces and familiar things; above all to be with Luke again, his voice and shining eyes, his moods of eager earnestness and frowning banter, his whole dear self. Luke—he was not dead, he would never be dead; he was here, here, as living and real as ever, more real than the empty present. Memory conquered death and time. . . . It was soothing to think that even for a few moments. But Luke was gone. And Mark.

Only the others left, and home—Malvern—holding like a chalice the distilled remembrances of the precious past, the essences of the dead. To be with those dead would be a gift from God. War had been a drug; now that that drug had been taken from him, how was he to support the anguish of memories? From somewhere courage to live must come. It was his duty now to preserve the home in a crumbling world: Luke and Mark had left that to him.

"Be with me," he cried to them.

The sound of his own voice startled him out of his revery. He got up wearily and walked slowly on to the Battery. The gun crew were playing ball to keep warm. Beyond their spiritless play the battered shape of Fort Sumter lay on the gray waters. A wide white side-wheel packet steamed warily from the mouth of the Ashley, close in to shore.

John realized that he was cold, deathly cold, cold clean through to the marrow of his bones. He walked briskly up King Street. It was several blocks before he met any signs of life. A forlorn figure stood in the doorway of a shop, gazing blankly at the blank sky. John's footfalls brought the forlorn figure's attention back to earth; Mr. Piluski's eyes brightened, his mouth fell open, and the big curved pipe fell out.

"Chonnie Sheldon!" he exploded, adroitly catching the pipe in mid-air without taking his pop-eyes off the apparition before him. "Is dot you or ain't it? My Gott, boy, you look like a corpse! Vhat!—no arm? Oh, my Gott! Vait till I call Minnie. Come on the inside."

He shook John's hand with both of his own and tried

to draw him into the shop. But John held back; he explained he had to get started for the country if he wanted to get home before dark.

"Vell, some udder time," Mr. Piluski nodded. "My boy, it's good to see you alive again even if you do look dead. They told me you vas killed along vith your brudders in Wirginia. Oh, don't speak of this var, this terrible, terrible var."

He shook his head in profound dejection and applied a light to his empty pipe.

John was staring up the street.

"We're not licked yet," he said.

"Ve're as good as gone," Mr. Piluski told the amber nymph that reclined on the curve of his pipe-stem. "As good as gone. Look." He drew John to the shop window, where a few remnants of shoddy and muslin strove pathetically to fill what had once been the place of proud silks and laces. "Soon there will be nudding. And all of my customers have gone to Columbia to get out of the vay of dot Hun, Sherman. Already he is in Sawannah. It von't be long before he pays us a wisit, and then ve'll have a taste of the wrath of Gott that passes all understanding."

When John left Mr. Piluski a few minutes later, he went back to the marketplace for Jim and Trump. It was dusk before the three travelers turned off the River Road into the somber shadows of Malvern's avenue. John walked and Jim rode. The mulatto's shoes had succumbed to the miles in North Carolina and his feet, not the leather-like hide of a field-slave, had finally succumbed, too. John, lost in the dreary circles of his thoughts, had not noticed Jim's plight until the road from Charleston was almost covered; then he had

taken the slave to task for not making his suffering known and had made him mount Trump. So they moved along under the ashen tatters of moss that hung from the dim branches of the live-oaks. Ahead at the end of the avenue the house beckoned, sadly holding out its arms to them in the failing light.

Maum Fibby was the first to catch sight of them. Peering out of the dormer window of the children's nursery to see what the weather promised for her rheumatism she saw three shapes loose themselves from the shadows of the avenue and come slowly around the darkening curve of the drive. Her jaw dropped.

"Jedus Gawd!"

She hardly knew whether or not to believe her old eyes. They had been deceiving her more and more of late, and now here was Mark's horse Trump with Mark's Jim in the saddle and Mark himself walking alongside. She rubbed her eyes and strained to pierce the half-light. The three children, in various stages of their Saturday-before-supper bath, forsook the wash-tub and the warmth of the fireplace and came crowding to the window. Maum Fibby was oblivious to the trio of thin young bodies that shivered questions at her in the cold air, for her faculties were centered on the trio approaching the house. All at once she realized that the gutter of the roof had come between them and her and that if she did not make haste the glory of announcing the amazing tidings would pass to another.

The floorboards squeaked in protest as Maum Fibby's ponderous scurry passed over them. She would carry the news straight down to Miss Nancy in the kitchen overseeing supper. Miss Nancy would faint

dead away, sure as God's mercy, when she heard Maussa Mark was come back from the war. Like some wobbling avalanche she began the descent of the stairs, damming up behind her the tumult of the children and Gyp, the spaniel. At the first landing her message got the better of her and burst out in a whoop that carried to the farthest corners of the house.

"Maussa Mark come home! Gawd Jedus fo' true 'e come!"

In the main hall her bellowings were abruptly subdued to a wild-eyed whisper by the appearance from the living-room of Maussa Charles.

"Young maussa come back," she whispered with the eyes starting out of her head. "Fo' Gawd, suh, I ain' lyin'. He *dere.*"

She flung her flabby old hand toward the door, and as if in answer to her summons the door opened. The tallow candles that had been resurrected to replace the empty oil lamps lurched crazily for an instant and then steadied with the closing of the door.

John felt his father's arms round him. The old gentleman was making little gulping sounds. John put his arm round the bent, bony shoulders. He had never seen his father act like this before. War had changed him, too. Nancy was there and behind her were the house slaves crowding in the dining-room doorway. She came and took his hand and tried to say something, but she could only cling to him. There were the children, Mark's children: David, Charlotte, and Ned. When they had given him wet smacking kisses, Nancy sent them upstairs with Maum Fibby. Now there were the slaves, bowing and grinning and gabbling a welcome. In a flash he was aware of how

he hated them. They were the cause of all the trouble, the cause of Luke's death and Mark's and the whole tempest of blood and horror. But he must speak to them, if only to get rid of them.

He turned back to his father.

"Betty's still with the Cranstons at Columbia?"

His father nodded.

And now it was no longer possible to put off the bitter question:

"Where's Mother?"

His father moved toward the living-room, and he followed. At the door Charles Sheldon put his hand on his son's shoulder.

"You know what to expect," he said. "After Mark's death it came suddenly. I wrote you."

John nodded and bit his lip. The living-room door opened, and he followed his father in. In an arm-chair before the fire was his mother. Diana stood behind the chair of what had once been her mistress and was now what she described to the Quarter as "a big ol' rag-doll wid all de stuffin' pull' out." John, moving with his father toward the chair, made himself keep from averting his eyes.

Charles Sheldon spoke to his wife.

"Martha, John is here."

Martha Sheldon made no further response than a fretful gurgling. A thin string of drivel escaped from the paralyzed lips, and the glassy vacant eyes moistened. The shriveled head continued to nod in palsied acquiescence. A skeleton forefinger shook itself free from the quilt that covered the knees and traveled unsteadily toward the arm of the chair, where a paper rested. The finger seemed unable to reach the paper.

Diana placed it on the quilt. John saw that the paper carried the letters of the alphabet printed in capitals. The finger hovered over the letters and tapped at last at one of them.

"*M*," Charles Sheldon nodded.

The finger tapped at *A* and then *R*. It came to rest on *K*.

Charles Sheldon cleared his throat.

John felt that he was suffocating. He stood motionless staring at the chair till his eyes closed of their own merciful volition.

"Son," he heard his father say, "get your dusty clothes off and wash up and by that time supper will be ready. There'll be plenty of time for talk later."

He was in the cool air of the hall again. He went on up to his room and shut the door. Luke's things were everywhere—his tin trunk that had been shipped home from Manassas, his clothes, his boots, all the miscellany of his life. He himself was here. The room was full of him. The sense of Luke's presence seized John, embraced, enveloped him.

He threw himself face down on the wide bed. When Lake came up a few minutes later with a pitcher of hot water, he found John in a deep sleep.

◈ ◈ ◈

It was a radiant day in February. A tumultuous west wind set the trees to sighing contortions against the vast azure of the sky and made mock of the spring-whispering warmth of the sunlight. To John, who was preparing Malvern to receive Sherman's Bummers, there seemed to be in the wind a multitude of faces whose mouths cried out to him as they swept past.

The Sheldon jewels and silver had been buried the night before without the knowledge of any of the slaves except Jim: a hole had been dug in the driveway directly in front of the house, where the Yankees would never think to thrust their bayonets, the boxes and sacks had been lowered into it, and the dirt and gravel tramped down; Jim had driven a horse and cart back and forth over the spot to blend it in with the rest of the driveway. Now, to-day, what remained of the plantation livestock had been sent off into the depths of the swamps, and bottles and casks from the wine-cellar had been submerged under the dark waters of the mill pond. The pick of the house furnishings had been hidden as well as possible in the woods near the house; the portraits had been taken across the river and secreted in the tangled undergrowth of the opposite shore. Finally, the limited supply of plantation provisions had been distributed among the cabins of the Quarter for concealment. Malvern was prepared to receive the marauders.

At noon the news came out from Charleston that Sherman had abandoned his feint to the eastward and was making a rapid advance northward toward Columbia. Two days before Charles Sheldon had set out for Columbia with Martha, Nancy, and the three children. Betty and her two children were already there. They were all trapped in the path of the holocaust, John realized; and without knowing how he could save them, he prepared at once to ride north.

He changed to his uniform and armed himself with his saber and revolver. Jim helped him to pack his saddle-bags. The rest of the slaves had been in a strange sort of panic for the past days, and with the

exception of Jim it had been impossible to get them to stay in the house. A sinister silence hung over the rooms as John made a last inspection. To Jim he gave careful instructions and rehearsed with him in particular what he must do in the event that any raiding bands penetrated to Malvern. Then he sent the trusted servant for Trump.

As John stood in the hallway after bolting the river door, a sudden presentiment set his spine tingling. For several breathless minutes he held himself motionless; then he walked to the front door and swung it open. In the driveway a score of horsemen were dismounting.

John swung the door closed behind him and with the blood pounding through him faced the men that came up both flights of steps in a rush. At the landing they came to an abrupt halt, arrested by the unexpected sight of a Confederate lieutenant barring their path. John's eyes flashing from one to another held them all. His revolver was leveled at the one he took to be the leader of the nondescript band, a blear-eyed giant in an officer's cap and a ragged uniform.

The giant gave vent to a quick loud jeer and waved John aside with an oath. He took a step forward, grimaced, and doubled up as John's revolver spat into his stomach. John fell back against the door as the bullets whipped into him. He kept pulling the trigger of his revolver until his arm went limp and the smoky shapes before his eyes began to sag and grow dim. In the swirling darkness before him stood the image of Luke, whom he was going now to rejoin in a world where there were no partings and no farewells. Across his dissolving consciousness sped the thought that his last duty had been done: death had been kind, and he

vas free to go. His lips parted in a smile as his eyes net Luke's.

When the raiders kicked the body aside and broke n the door, they found themselves confronted by nother unexpected sight that brought them to another brupt halt. Before them in the hallway stood Jim with is hands raised above his head and an expression of error in his bronze face.

"Run fo' you' life!" he gasped out. "Dis house full f smallpox!"

"Smallpox?"

"What you trying to give us, nigger?"

"'Fo' Gawd, I tellin' you de Gawd's trut'!"

"What you doing here then?"

Jim pointed to where John's body lay on the landing ehind the men. "'E kep' me. I couldn' git away. All de res' laid out up yonder dead wid de pox. Now ie gone, an' I free."

He made a move forward, and the raiders instinc- ively drew back.

"Get away from me, nigger!"

"Stay where you are unless you want a plug in you."

"Let's get the hell out of here—we got plenty more alls to make."

The voices of the men mingled in confusion. Then ll at once the hall was empty.

When Charles Sheldon returned home to Malvern after the burning of Columbia bringing with him Nancy and Betty and his grandchildren (Martha Sheldon had died the night of the conflagration—Bob Cranston was with the remnant of Hampton's Legion), he found that the house had been stripped of every-

thing movable by the slaves who had not run away "to Freedom." He sent Jim to summon them from the Quarter. As freemen they took their time about coming; sullen, they looked up from the lawn at the impotent old man, their former master, whose hair was snow-white now that the blockade prevented his obtaining any longer the French dye that had kept it black. They listened to his appeal that they return what they had stolen and prepare to go peaceably back to work. When he had finished, most of them walked away mocking him; a few remained to mutter threats. They were free now: everything was theirs now to help themselves to; no need to work; no need to take mouth from white folks. . . . Nancy and Betty persuaded Charles Sheldon to come back into the house. Later, with Jim and one or two loyal old women, they made a quiet canvass of the Quarter, begging back many of the things that had been stolen and getting enough provisions to feed the children and themselves.

That night Charles Sheldon, the two mothers, and the children sat listening behind barred doors and drawn blinds to the festivities in the Quarter, where casks from the mill pond were being opened.

The sky to the north and to the south of Malvern was still stained with the flames of burning houses.

◆ VIII ◆

THE war was ended. Lee had sat talking with Grant in a living-room at Appomattox Village nd then had ridden away through the misty sunlight f that April Sunday, oblivious to the salutes of a group f Union officers, oblivious to the swelling tide of pring in the air, aware only of the bitter solace of the nessage he was bearing to his men. It was ended, and eace spread over the land like cool water on the lips f a heretic released at last from the rack.

And yet a few days later at Malvern, Trump, veteran nd thoroughbred, the plantation's one remaining orse from all the well-stocked stables, pricked up his ars and spread his nostrils at the sound of guns down he river. His alert senses detected battle; but this time is senses deceived him. It was not the voice of battle hat came to Malvern from Charleston. It was the oice of victory.

The town, gaping with wounds from fire and shell, vas the scene that day of a stirring, an inspiring cele- ration, the fourth anniversary of the evacuation of Sumter. Her own desolate people kept indoors, leav- ng the streets, gay with flags, to the exultant ladies nd gentlemen who had come from the North for the great occasion. In the harbor Dahlgren's fleet in full dress fired salvo after salvo from Dahlgren guns, and smoke stood out with weird suddenness from the decks nd hung fluffily on the water until the breeze gath- ered strength to waft it in toward the swarming Battery.

The blare of the fleet's bands reached Sumter brokenly. There in the midst of mounded ruins had been erected a stand and rows of seats decorated with red-white-and-blue bunting; and orators were prepared to harangue a jubilant audience. The Reverend Mr. Harris opened the service with a tactfully brief prayer and gave place to the Reverend Mr. Storr, who read in a voice at once powerful and mellifluous that ever-beautiful Psalm, the One Hundred and Twenty-sixth, beginning: "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream." Precisely at noon General Anderson raised with his own hand the flag which had been lowered in 1861. In an address that brought into play all his gifts of eloquence Henry Ward Beecher stressed the North's feeling of brotherhood for the South, now that the erring sheep had returned to the fold. The services were concluded brilliantly with the singing of *Onward Christian Soldiers* and *The Star Spangled Banner.*

Oh, it was a glorious day! As Mrs. Osgood, wife of a Federal naval officer, said to Mrs. Perkins, wife of a Federal army officer: "Wasn't it *perfect?"* And specially its being Good Friday. Could you imagine? Seemed almost a miracle that the anniversary of Fort Sumter should fall on the anniversary of Christ's death on the cross.

The two ladies had a divine time that afternoon walking the streets of the old town, looking at the architecture (it *was* quaint—what was left of it) and exclaiming with catholic enthusiasm at the charm of a doorway here and the excellence of Northern marksmanship there. Well, Mrs. Perkins observed, it did look like a judgment on the dissipated and proud

Charlestonians, who thought they were so much better than everybody else. Mrs. Osgood agreed and made a vague but insidious reference to Sodom and Gomorrha, to which Mrs. Perkins replied with a nod and a wink. They went into deserted gardens and helped themselves to any flowers that had survived the siege; and on Tradd Street, where the houses were right on the street and the windows conveniently low, they peered into the rooms wherever the blinds were not too tightly closed. They attended the service at St. Michael's to rest their feet. After that they took to the streets again, refreshed in body and soul, and decided to spend the time until sunset distributing pennies to the slaves they had in their own modest way helped to free. But they felt compelled to abandon this good work before they had gone very far. It was not because of any lack of pennies—the ladies had laden themselves with copper coins; nor was it because of any lack of receptacles for their charity—the ladies found themselves surrounded by a grateful little mob of darkies of every age and condition. All of these were unfortunately not sober. The air was filled with clamor and laughter and with the pungent odor of rum and black bodies. The ladies, with their lace handkerchiefs to their noses, made futile efforts to extricate themselves from their appreciative black brothers and sisters, and while they sought to escape from attentions so touching, so moving, so overpowering, they were good-naturedly relieved of their pennies, their purses, the flowers in their bonnets, the bonnets themselves, their parasols, the trimmings of their dresses. At this point they were rescued by a man who came out of a nearby house and put them

into a carriage. They spent the rest of the afternoon in their hotel bemoaning the loss of their accessories without once recognizing the miraculous nature of their escape from presenting the somewhat startling spectacle of two mature New England ladies gracing a Charleston thoroughfare in pantalettes or less.

They revived in time to accompany their husbands to the grand Army-Navy banquet and ball. Later there were fireworks on the Battery, all the forts were alight, and bands blared again. While their husbands left them for a few moments on some piece of business, Mrs. Osgood and Mrs. Perkins sat talking against the pleasant background of colored lights and good brassy music. They were discussing the various costumes and headdresses of the ladies in their vicinity, many of whom appeared to be the wives and daughters of immigrating Northern merchants, and this subject led back somehow to the misadventures of the afternoon and from there to the whole negro question. It was Mrs. Perkins's thought that the poor downtrodden things were pathetic in their desire to show in their own uncouth way their gratitude. Of course, Mrs. Osgood put in, they were just exactly like children in that they had that faculty of letting themselves go in joy or sorrow. Now, praise God, they would have equal opportunity with their former masters and mistresses and in a few generations they would be splendid, useful citizens. Yes, indeed, Mrs. Perkins agreed, and if first along the South suffered from the excesses of certain low elements among the darkies, that was to be expected after all those years of cruelty and horror. Naturally, Mrs. Perkins added, she hoped there would be no outrages against Southern woman-

hood. Mrs. Osgood hoped and prayed there wouldn't. Still, the more she thought about it the more she feared that now that the darkies were free in fact as well as theory Southern womanhood would be bound to suffer. Mrs. Perkins with a sigh of resignation didn't see how it could be avoided. Well, it was part of the penalty that the South was paying for the sin of slavery.

"Slavery," Mrs. Osgood observed, "has always exacted a penalty from Southern white women. It's a well-known fact that most Southern planters had mistresses from the slave-quarters. Why, a planter's slave was often his son. Nice state of affairs, wasn't it?"

"Tt!—think of it," Mrs. Perkins replied. "And do you know the Reverend Amos Moffet, who's doing missionary work among the freedmen at Port Royal, tells me that it was the usual thing for planters' white sons to be initiated into—" (here Mrs. Perkins glanced around and leaned close to Mrs. Osgood's ear) *"—sex* by the house slaves!"

"Oh, I don't doubt it a*tall,"* Mrs. Osgood nodded. 'And I want to tell you something else. . . ."

When the two Northern ladies finally disposed of his painful topic, they turned their attention to the more agreeable subject of feminine attire. They were surprised at some of the things they saw. They would have been considerably more surprised had they known that at the moment John Wilkes Booth was shouting from the stage of a theater in Washington: "The South is Avenged!"

◈ ◈ ◈

Thus passed the day that had brought back to the horse Trump the tremors of battle. And after that

passed many days and many months, carrying farther and farther away the tumult of the war. Life seemed to have ebbed from the Sheldon plantation; Malvern lay exhausted, hopeless, almost inanimate. Then little by little a measure of life flowed back; there was a feeble stir in the stricken community.

For Trump there was no rest from one year's end to the next. Upon his war-weary flanks fell a multitude of peace-time duties. When he was not suffering the humiliation and strain of plowing and hauling like a mule, he was bearing Charles Sheldon to and from town on errands of petty barter, of pawning and mortgaging, on endless visits to the Federal authorities to protest confiscations and the demoralizing influence of the Freedmen Bureaus. At last came the final ignominy of being hitched to a buggy when Charles Sheldon secured the position of postman for the River Road section of the parish. Horse and driver followed the route with bowed heads.

The only bright spots in the dreary succession of days were Sundays. Then Trump was turned loose to graze on the unkempt lawns and wander through the wild gardens. Always Nancy came to find him with a little paper of brown sugar; but often the children came with her and the day of rest was spoiled. There were six of them to put up with: David, in his early 'teens but heavy as a man; his sister Lottie, fair-haired and frail and easy to carry providing Ned, her younger brother, didn't add his weight to hers; and there were Stephen and Bert Cranston, fast-growing boys, and their little sister Sarah, who had been born at Malvern the year after the war. It was a great relief to Trump when Bob Cranston got work in Charleston and took

Betty and their three children there to live. It was an even greater relief when one day in the spring of 1873 David Sheldon ran away from home, leaving a note that told his mother not to fret—things were so hopeless he was going to Texas to make his fortune. That left only Lottie and Ned to cope with.

As the years dragged by old Trump attained his thirtieth birthday. Rations were regular now and although he was barred from the lawns and gardens, which were beginning to come back to their former state, he was turned into the pasture by the river to spend his last days in ease. The pasture was no longer empty; there were mules again and cows, a young saddle horse of Master Ned's, and three foolish colts that frisked and galloped as if the world were a playground made for their particular delight. Let them frolic, Trump mused; they would soon enough discover what sort of a place the world really was. He used to shake his head at them with a sage whinny and retire to browse in some solitary corner.

Sometimes he rested his lean head on the top rail of the fence and gazed off over the river and the abandoned rice-fields with introspective eyes. Long ago those weary eyes had looked out with innocent eagerness upon a world lovely, exciting, and bright. In their early prime they had seen the happy days before the war, when the tides of Malvern had stood at the flood. They had witnessed the death struggle of Mark Sheldon and of the nation for which he and the others had died, a nation destined to perish so soon after its birth despite all the blood and agony poured out for its life. Those eyes had looked upon the bitter topsy-turvy world of Reconstruction, when masters went on

foot while their former slaves rode; when the lowly blacks, surviving the great cataclysm that crashed down the social structure of the whites as grasses survive the tempests that rend mighty trees, controlled the government in partnership with renegade whites, and South Carolina was a mad-house of corruption and lawlessness. They had seen, those eyes, the desperate years of the Red Shirts, when the state had been redeemed at last under the leadership of Wade Hampton. Finally, those old eyes of Trump's had seen the Sheldon estate, shrunken to Malvern, pass from the dying hands of Charles Sheldon into the hands of his grandson and heir, Ned Sheldon.

The industry of phosphate-mining was commencing to penetrate the river country, and Trump in those last days of his life saw the first steps in Malvern's renascence. It was evident to Nancy and Ned, who came frequently to the pasture to see the old horse, that he could not outlive the spring. The ears that had once pricked up so sharply at all the challenging sounds of the world drooped despondently now; the eyes looked out dimly from deep hollows; the once sensitive lips hung pendulous and feeble.

Trump's days were numbered. He moved listlessly about the fragrant pasture cropping here and there a bunch of tender shoots while he awaited the call. When it came, he lay down under the glossy leaves of a magnolia near the river's edge. But whether it was the chill in his old bones or some last whimsy in his failing brain, he roused himself near the end to stumble out of the shade into the soft spring sunlight.

Presently there was the faint music of wild ducks' wings high over the dreaming live-oaks. Higher still

—far, far up in the blue—a dark spot circled. Other spots appeared from the four corners of the heavens and joined this first spot. They circled down to a lower level, glided, and circled down again. At last they hovered low on shadowy wings and alighted on the fence where old Trump had been wont to rest his head. Their keen, patient eyes saw that his heart and heels were stilled forever.

PART THREE

I

IN the autumn of 1892 Charleston was fluttered by the marriage of Ned Sheldon to Sarah Cranston. The town had forecast the union of Malvern's heir with any one of a dozen young ladies (most particularly Emily Sausser, daughter of former Governor Sausser), but the name of Sarah had not been included in this list. And now here was Ned betrothed and married to his own first cousin before anybody had time to say *boo*. Well, Charleston was not at all sure it approved. Disliking to be taken by surprise in such matters it shook its head dubiously: marriage of first cousins was all very fine from the point of view of romance and family solidarity, but biologically it was a very uncertain business to say the least. It might turn out splendidly; but on the other hand— . . .

On that April morning of her twenty-sixth birthday, Sarah Sheldon awoke before dawn to the enchanting song of a mocking-bird. Against the darkness and the hoarse crowing of the Quarter cocks, it stood out shining and tender as if it were the voice of the happiness that filled her heart. She lay in a trance of

happiness while the quickening light revived the musical chattering of sparrows in magnolias and live-oaks and flashed at last into the room the first ruddy-gold rays of the sun.

But she must keep all this bliss to herself. She must get up quietly, dress without a sound, and go tiptoeing downstairs just as if it were some ordinary day and not her birthday and Ned's homecoming after almost a month in Beaufort. Cousin Charlotte in the next room mustn't be disturbed in her morning beauty sleep, specially since Bert was coming out from town with Ned. Languid, charming, pink and white Charlotte, who never rode and hated dogs and yet expected to marry sporting Bert. The others she had sent about their business and had waited year after year for Bert, who never would stick to one job and had gone from law to clerking, from clerking to reporting, from reporting to banking, and from banking to Cotton Row. Handsome, genial, irresponsible Bert, with his lovable smile and his pleasantly husky voice. The family had always expected great things of him; now at last he did seem to have settled down to something. Charlotte would not have much longer to wait before she, too, would have a singing heart.

Sarah snuggled down under the covers for a last moment with her secret bliss. . . . This old four-poster had cradled so much happiness, so much pain. Here in this bed her own lost mother, Betty Sheldon, had been born and had given birth to her. Here those other Sheldon mothers had brought forth their sons and daughters. Long ago Mary Sheldon, that phantom in taffeta and lace, had been the first to lie here and know the ecstasy and anguish of love. And after

her, far-away Laura, Gilbert Sheldon's second wife. It seemed hard to believe that they had ever actually lived, those old ghosts. It was possible to conceive of them as having existed in a world of myth, a shadow world of unreal gestures; but to think of them experiencing the myriad little intimate actions and reflections, the tiny satisfactions and disappointments that made up almost the sum of life—that was difficult. And yet their eyes once rested on these walls, this ceiling, or gazed in many moods through these windows at this same spring vista of the river. . . . Eliza had lain here, and Dorothy, and Martha. Charles Sheldon was the only one who had been born here and had died here. . . . And now she, Sarah Sheldon, was adding her new memories to the conglomeration of the old. To-night Ned would be here again at her side. . . .

But there was no more time for dreaming. Sarah threw back the covers and got up. She pushed her feet into slippers and went to the window. The radiance of the early morning sunlight on the dewy lawns and gardens and on the shimmering river made her forget the chillness of the air; a shiver called her back to herself, and she closed the window softly and began to dress, smiling to herself in the mirror across the room.

By noon Malvern was suffused with the gentle splendor of the spring day. In the house preparations in kitchen and pantry had reached the stage where they could take care of themselves, and Sarah felt that it was safe to put aside her apron. After surveying the dining-room and giving Ben the usual final cautions she went upstairs to change her dress. Her face, she

saw with disapproval, was flushed scarlet and her hair would have to be done up again. It seemed to take an endless time to put on the new dress with the little velvet bows all the way down the front, and then there was no servant upstairs to hook up the back.

Fortunately Aunt Nancy was in her room. She agreed to help, but under protest: she had no use for the modern styles with their preposterous leg-of-mutton sleeves and bustles and skirts that dragged on the ground and threatened to trip one at any moment. At last it was over, the final hook fitted into the final eye: Sarah gave Aunt Nancy a hug of thanks and hurried downstairs. Charlotte was in the hall, inspecting with her blonde head tilted to one side a vase of irises she had arranged on one of the consoles.

"Come help me cut some roses, Sare," she said.

She gave the irises a few deft touches that set them into a more pleasing pattern and took Sarah's arm. They went out the river door and down the steps to the lawn and took the path that wound off between high banks of azalea blossoms to the rose garden. To the left flanking the gardens was the tender green of the reviving woods, cut here and there by tall saffron fountains of jasmine that sprayed the air with breathless sweetness; before them was the sweep of the river and the marshes with the incongruous ashen shape of the phosphate plant across on the far shore. The soft spring wind made branches and leaves toss and sway, beckon and gesture, and flecked the water with endless dancing sparks. It was a day of sailing clouds—half sun, half shadow. Sarah wanted to shout to the wind and she smiled to see that Charlotte's placid brown eyes were shining and that her lips were parted.

"Couldn't you just shout?" Sarah laughed. "I'm o happy, Lottie, I can hardly breathe."

"Sugar, you're so silly." Charlotte smiled languidly nd began to cut the crimson and white roses.

"Oh, let's be silly. No one minds. I'm too happy ecause Ned's coming home. And you ought to be oo happy with Bert coming."

Charlotte flushed and laid the roses she had cut in he basket.

"You remember what Maum Molly says about being oo happy, don't you?" she asked Sarah. "When ou're feeling too happy, that's the time to watch out. When you can't swing any higher, you're obliged to wing lower."

"Pooh!" Sarah laughed. But she felt a twinge of hagrin. It was dangerous to be spontaneous and play- ul with Charlotte. She kept her emotions locked up ight within her white breast and she expected you o do the same. She was clipping busily again, smil- ng that languid, self-contained little smile of hers. The snip of the shears, the soft rustle of young leaves, nd the defiant cawing of a band of crows flying up he river confused Sarah's hearing as she strained to atch the sound of a carriage on the driveway beyond he house. Would Ned, Ned, Ned never come? At he bend in the river a white heron, messenger of pring, rose and flapped leisurely away over the narshes, and at the same moment another white shape, arger and trailing a feather of black smoke, came into iew on the sparkling curve of water. Sarah shielded ier eyes with her hand.

"Whose boat is that, Lottie?"

Charlotte looked up.

"The steam launch from the Hatton Plantation, isn't it?"

"It's too big for the *Mary Lou.*" Sarah gasped with a sudden surmise and grabbed Charlotte's hand. "Do you suppose they've come by water? Lottie! That's just what they've done—they've chartered a little yacht. Wave!"

"Sare, dear, please be careful of my dress."

A white plume of steam stood for an instant above the yacht's black feather of smoke; a short, suave whistle startled the shore. Sarah had taken her handkerchief out of her belt and was waving and calling. A faint echoing came back. Charlotte wouldn't wave, nor would she hurry. Sarah wanted to run down to the landing. Plenty of time, Charlotte said; she had no intention of skipping down like a silly school-girl. She took her time, and the white yacht had already come alongside the wharf before they had walked the little distance from the rose garden.

And there was Ned, not in the gray suit he had worn away, but in the white flannel trousers, a blue coat and a white yachting cap. He was coming to meet her, and she left Charlotte behind. The lips coming toward her were parted in his dear smile; and then she was in his arms.

"Oh, Ned, Ned," she whispered. "I thought you were never coming home."

"Bless your heart," he laughed. "Everything all right?"

"Everything except that."

He laughed again, gave her a little pat and squeeze, and turned to Charlotte, who had come up.

"Hello, Sis." She gave him her pink cheek to kiss.

What do you think? We've brought extra company. Evelyn Brady—the actress that's playing in town tonight. Bert met her when she was here before and he was on the paper. She wanted to see the gardens."

"An actress?" Charlotte asked her brother with a withering look. "Not one of the Golden Crook Company, I hope."

"Don't look at me," Ned grinned. "Bert's idea. Come along now—you've got to do the right thing."

He was striding back toward the yacht, leaving Charlotte and Sarah to follow. Sarah saw that Charlotte's cheeks had gone pale though her lips continued to smile.

"What do you suppose Bert's thinking of?" Sarah whispered as they walked. "Is this some prank they've worked up for us?"

There was no time for Charlotte to answer. They were there, and the confusion of introductions and greetings was beginning as Ned and Bert handed the passengers from the deck of the boat to the wharf. Miss Evelyn Brady came first; then Sarah's father, her brother Stephen, and her sister-in-law Maude. Maude gave Sarah and Charlotte a glance full of significance as she stepped onto the wharf.

When it was over, Ned bowed to Sarah, kissed her hand, and waved toward the boat.

"Happy birthday—a little present for you, angel," he smiled. "Her name's the *Vagabond*."

There was another confusion, this time of laughter and exclamations.

For Sarah the rest of the day was an increasingly bitter turmoil. She tried to look pleased when Ned

took her—and the others—over the *Vagabond* from stem to stern. He was as excited as a boy with a new game, showing her—and the others—the big brass bound steering wheel, the forward cabin with its fine fixtures, the engine-room with its hot-oil smell and Harry Barber, the engineer, grinning from ear to ear in a halo of steam, and finally the wicker armchairs on the awninged after deck. Couldn't he see that everything was spoiled? Hadn't he realized that on this day of all days—her birthday and the day that marked the end of their first separation—it was himself that she wanted? It was bad enough to have the family present to-day, but to have brought along with the wonderful birthday gift this Evelyn Brady, a comic opera star, a horrible rouged creature with a tremendous bust, flashy clothes, loud voice, and coarse laugh—had Ned and Bert gone mad? Ned was behaving as if it were really Miss Brady's birthday and he were giving the boat to her; and Bert had hardly taken the trouble to address two words to Charlotte, and those had been delivered in the most carefree manner in the world as if he were totally unconscious that anything was wrong. Of course it would have been quite impossible to have told from Charlotte's quiet affability that it was not the most natural and delightful thing imaginable to have Miss Evelyn Brady of the Golden Crook Company out to Malvern for the day.

Sarah wanted to laugh. The whole thing was preposterous—the singing, dazzling bliss of the morning and now this—Charlotte listening with her languid little smile to Miss Brady, who was telling how she loved the quaint charm of the Dear Old South ("You women are the most alluring in the whole wide world

ıd your men the best sports. How about that, ertie?")—and she herself standing here next to Sis-r-in-law Maude (who would most certainly go back Charleston and spread the story all over town) con-aling behind a vivacious smile the hot resentment she lt at having her day of happiness thus suddenly oisoned. She would have liked to have been able to rush aside all these extraneous people and crazy cir-ımstances that had maliciously assembled to keep er from Ned. If this was one of the little jokes that ed and Bert liked to concoct when they were in cele-rating spirits, for once they had gone too far. The ıoment she saw Ned alone, she would give him not ıe tender welcome she had so long dreamed of, but bitter piece of her mind.

But Sarah found that the opportunity of seeing Ned one was slow in coming. After the inspection of the oat Ned and Bert took Charlotte and Miss Brady for long stroll through the gardens. During this interim arah had time to compare notes with her father, ephen, Maude, and Aunt Nancy. Maude, who was ıe spokesman for her husband and her father-in-w, was full of righteous indignation and the fear ıat she had been "very curt" on the way up the ver.

"And," she concluded, "I think it's a scandal ask-g that actress or whatever she is to this house. And ı your birthday, Sarah! Well, I don't care what at-tude the rest of you take, I've already told Stephen ıat I'll never ride back to town with that—woman."

To which Aunt Nancy replied: "Don't be a fool, laude Cranston. Ned and Bert have been celebrat-g Sarah's birthday, and we've all got to make the

best of it. Naturally we'll none of us forget that thi woman is our guest."

Dinner opened stiffly. Miss Brady was visibly sub dued by the antique mahogany, the massive old silve service, the crested china, and the white-haired lad who presided at the head of the table. But as dinne and the wines progressed, Evelyn began to relax, an it was not long before she was quite herself. By th time the birthday cake was brought in, she was feel ing enough at home to risk telling her favorite story She was surprised and touched at the hearty receptio it received. She had done the Sheldons the injustic of supposing that they would put on airs with her.

It turned out to be an ideal day. As she told Aun Nancy when she was leaving that evening:

"I'll never forget the lovely, lovely day you've give me, dearie. You were hospitality itself. I feel as i I had known all of you for years."

It had been really ideal. After dinner there ha been a trip up the river in the *Vagabond,* and the later a delicious cold supper with mint juleps, an finally a lovely, lovely trip back to Charleston b moonlight, when she had sung songs for them to th accompaniment of Bert's banjo.

She said to Bert on the carriage ride from the doc to her hotel:

"Bertie, you gave your Evelyn a daisy outing to-day Thought your people were going to be snobs, darling but they're all right—take off my hat to them."

Meanwhile, Sarah on her way up the river wit Ned, was finding it impossible, although now at las she had him alone, to tell him anything but how muc she loved him.

◈ II ◈

LATE in June Malvern took a last deep breath, closed her windows and doors, and said good-by for the summer to her family. Time had taught her how to sleep away the long torpid days.

The train part of the journey to the mountains was a trial. At first it was exhilarating to be actually on the way; every little trackside shanty seemed worth looking at. But before many miles were gone the jogging and jarring, the endless starting and stopping, the heat and the dust brought on a feeling of depression that grew with the hours.

Aunt Nancy's nerves were the first to fray. It was not her custom to indulge in any form of relaxation in public, and as time dragged by, she began to feel discomfort. But she refused to show it; she maintained her rigid posture, chin up, eyes to the front. Ladies traveled with dignity—no slouching, no snoozing. From time to time she passed under her nose a handkerchief scented with lavender to combat the offensive odors that came from the two countrymen in the seat ahead. As the first lap of the journey dragged on and on, she grew more and more tense. Would they never reach Columbia? She began to consult the conductor each time he passed regarding time and distance. Talking to Charlotte, who shared the seat with her, would have been an excellent method for forgetting herself and the sluggish miles, but Charlotte was lost in the pages of one of her pet Russian or French novels—

"Anna Karenina" it was this time—and refused with polite monosyllables to be disturbed. Aunt Nancy would have enjoyed reading, too (most emphatically not Charlotte's type of book), but her pride, which allowed her the use of a distinguished walking-stick, denied her the use of glasses. Ned and Sarah were in the seat across the aisle, but of course it was out of the question to shout back and forth.

At last Columbia came and the restful bustle of changing trains. Then the rattling and jogging and dust again. The lunch basket was brought out: Aunt Nancy took one piece of fried chicken and one cream cheese sandwich; it was barbarous to eat on a train, but it was equally barbarous to starve. She allowed Ned to insist on her taking a drop of brandy.

The miles sulked by. Aunt Nancy began to feel tense again; but there was nothing to do about it—nothing to do but listen to the loud drawlings of the two new men up ahead. They were innocent of odors; they exhaled, however, noxious politics. They looked like politicians of the Ben-Tillman–Cracker school, the wretches that were trying to turn out the old guard, the Confederate Veterans, the Hampton men, the heroes who had saved the state in Reconstruction days. How Mark's blood would boil to hear such ingratitude! Aunt Nancy was aware that her own blood was boiling. She would have liked to have taken her cane to the miserable upstarts.

Her anger faded as her mind drifted away from the present back to Mark and the days that were gone. Those were the precious days, the days of fierce zest, some bitter, some sweet, but days that had a flavor—not the insipid nowadays. And they would never die

those days and those dear ones—Mark and the others, while there were Sheldons to keep them alive in memory. And there would always be Sheldons. Sarah and Ned would see to that, surely; Charlotte and Bert soon. The past would be saved, preserved, snatched from the hunger of time, and projected on into the years to come. With such glowing thoughts in mind, life for all its sorrows was beautiful.

Aunt Nancy daydreamed of her grandchildren, those precious receptacles that would carry into the future the proud heritage of the past. Did Ned and Sarah appreciate their responsibility? They were taking their time about it. And would Charlotte and Bert delay when they were finally united? There must be many hostages given to the future; safety lay in numbers. Aunt Nancy began to multiply in her mind a little band of hostages. Three for Ned and Sarah, three for Bert and Charlotte, would be none too many. At least two boys and one girl apiece. The Ned and Sarah grandchildren would naturally be most to the point, for they would bear the Sheldon name; the others would be auxiliaries, reserves. She wondered what their names would be and she had not gone far in this agreeable but soporific pursuit when she suddenly realized that her chin was resting on her bosom. She snapped her head up with a quick look around to see if any one had noticed: Charlotte was still engrossed in her novel; across the aisle Ned's place was vacant, and Sarah was looking out of the window. Aunt Nancy took a deep breath, stiffened her back, and returned to her pleasant meditations.

The night was spent at the stuffy Johnson House in Chester, and the next day was another tedium of swel-

tering cars, dust, and delays. But that night the party slept under blankets in a little village hotel at the foot of the Blue Ridge, and the following day they took a carriage for the long pull over Linville Mountain. Old Jim and his wife, Maum Molly, followed in a wagon with the trunks.

The day was brilliant, and as the ascent progressed spirits climbed. Aunt Nancy recovered from her wilted state and admired the scenery; it was her first visit to the mountains and Sarah's, too, and they were not able to exclaim enough over the glorious views, the cloud-hung slopes, the vertiginous drops. Ned, to whom the mountains were not a new world, enjoyed his mother's and his wife's enthusiasm. Charlotte had never seen mountains before, but she took them as she took everything, with a composed little smile. When at dusk the carriage came down into the little mountain valley where the village and cottages of Blowing Rock nestled and Ned asked his sister how she liked the mountains, she told him that they were rather fine but—she shrugged her shoulders vaguely.

That night as Ned and Sarah undressed before the crackling fire in their room in the rambling, rustic cottage, Ned said:

"Sis doesn't seem to care for it up here."

"She'll feel differently about it," Sarah smiled, "when Bert comes."

"Trouble with her," Ned said, "she's always so composed. There's such a thing as being too composed. There's such a thing as not feeling anything."

"Because she doesn't show her feelings, dear, doesn't mean she hasn't any."

"Oh, I know. But honestly I'd give anything to see

her show just once what goes on in her heart. If anything."

He shook his head.

◈ ◈ ◈

For Sarah the summer swept by with the headlong rush of happy days. Well-being was in the buoyant air, and it became a habit to be light-hearted, for here in this amazing new world of sky and gently-soaring heights was no trace of the brooding that lurked in the low-country. There were no memories of the sad past here, no tyranny of surroundings, none of the feeling that sometimes crept over her at home of living in a twilight world, a world peopled more with the dead than the living.

She waked each morning with the dawn and took the path that wound up the steep slope behind the cottage through the fragrant woods to the little pasture at the crest. Seated on a rock ledge she could watch the sun come up from behind the distant range of mountains and flood the misty plains with golden light. On the way back to the cottage she picked wild strawberries wet with dew and broke off rhododendron blossoms for the breakfast table. The others would just be getting up when she came in flushed and breathless.

Sometimes Ned could be coaxed into taking this early morning tramp, but he preferred to sleep. After breakfast he was ready for a long horseback ride over the stony mountain roads or a pilgrimage up the Paradise Knob trail. For the rides he liked to gather a cavalcade of cottagers and for the tramps a good-sized party. If the weather was chill and rainy, a great fire

must be built, a steaming rum punch made, and a party assembled for cards.

Ned had to go back to Charleston for the first two weeks in August, but Sarah found that for the first time she did not miss him. She scarcely thought of him at all except to wonder that she did not think of him more often or to regret that the phosphate-mining business was keeping him in the stifling city while she was enjoying the cool mountains. She no longer felt lonely for him, for now he seemed to be always with her, locked deep in her being. He was being born again here under her heart, and she carried him with her now wherever she went.

She began to live in a dream and spent most of the time by herself, walking the forest paths with a book that told her the names of the wild flowers or cradling her happiness on the rock ledge in the high pasture, where the stillness around her was so vast that the flight of a bee or the tinkle of a far-off cowbell were momentous sounds. It was a place for dreams, this tilted meadow high above the world. Soft patches of cloud-shadow moved slowly over the wooded slopes. . . .

When Ned came back, Sarah took him up to her pasture to tell him. He was all clumsy tenderness and nervous, absurd advice. What did she mean by continuing to climb mountains and even ride horse back? She must sit down and be quiet. It was with difficulty that she persuaded him that a little exercise would be a good thing.

Aunt Nancy was transported at the news. The mountain air had put the old lady in excellent spirits and now she was—in a dignified way—beside herself.

She immediately unbended with certain of the neighboring cottagers whose existence (they were from Georgia) she had not seemed aware of before. Her tongue softened marvelously, and she laughed at the jokes of the little community's poorest wits and listened attentively to the most boring gossip. She stopped cross-questioning Ned on his handling of her affairs; she began visiting the families of poverty-stricken mountaineers with baskets of food and words of wisdom and sympathy. Above all she sewed, endlessly, on tiny garments. Hugh must have the best of everything from the start. The world for Nancy Sheldon had abruptly recovered the bright and felicitous colors of her own youth.

Even Charlotte became excited. She gave up her mandolin, her composing of verse, and her attempts to capture in water-colors the elusive moods of the mountains and assisted in the sewing with her delicate needlework. She began to take little strolls with Sarah and to take a mild but definite interest in her surroundings. When in September Bert came up from Charleston for his vacation, he was pleasantly surprised to find a Charlotte that was as beautiful as ever but not quite so impassive; and when he told her that if she would be ready they could marry in the autumn, he found in his arms a Charlotte that he hardly knew. There was a contagion of happiness in the air, and the bright September days sped away in a whirl of rapturous hours.

◈ ◈ ◈

The last nights at Blowing Rock had been frosty, but summer had not yet left the low-country. The sun was still blazing hot, the cotton and corn had not been

wholly harvested, people were still worried at the possibility of a hurricane. But it was good to get home to Malvern, Sarah thought, wonderful as the mountains had been: good to be again under the protecting wings of the old house, good to throw open windows, to air rooms soggy with heat, to get the servants back into the swing of things; it was good to work in the gardens again, to stretch the eyes over the familiar river view, and to see the *Vagabond* come sliding down the ways from her shed and rest her white, lithe form on the dark waters. It was good to see old neighbors again and hear the parish gossip or to go to Charleston for the more elaborate news of the town, for services at St. Michael's, or for a meeting and a cup of tea with friends. It was particularly good to lie again in the old four-poster, dreaming of the future.

Summer mellowed at last into the golden hazes and brisk winds of autumn, and autumn faded slowly into the grays of winter. Christmas came and went, and Sarah's time drew near. Aunt Nancy took over the management of the house. It was a stormy period; somehow the servants weathered it. Maum Molly was the hidden peacemaker. The men servants were easy to conciliate; it was the women that Maum Molly had trouble with.

"No buckra ain' gwine walk ober me," Lula complained in the kitchen, pouting out her thick lips and rolling her eyes. "'E too crazy, dat 'oman, de way 'e go on. 'E pure fo'gits slavery times is past gone. I done tol' 'em yistiddy dat ef 'e lip me agin, I gone fo' true. Yes, Lawd!"

Maum Molly's eyes snapped. "Do, gal, fo' Gawd's sake pull in dat flappin' mout'! Y' ain' gwine make

no worriation fo' young missie an' 'e upstairs fixin' o' do some birthin'."

"I ain' worryin' 'bout no buckra," Lula came back hrilly with a shrug of her shoulders.

"Take care, gal!" Maum Molly flared. "Don' le' me hear no mo' riprap 'bout what you gwine do an' what you ain'. Ef you ain' got sense fo' put up wid you' White Folks, you po' reconstruction nigger, you better git some direc'ly. 'Fo' Gawd, gal, I believe you ookin' fo' a cuss."

"Do don' put bad mout' on me!" Lula gasped with udden alarm. "You wouldn' cunjuh Lula, Granny!"

"I ain' sayin' what I won' do ef you don' ac' decen'."

"I ain' t'ink of leavin' fo' true, Granny," Lula whined.

Aunt Nancy was not aware that it was Maum Molly's good offices that were preventing the house ervants from leaving. She was, in fact, mystified as o why they did not leave. She had give them provo- ation enough, in all conscience. She had even told Amanda, the cook, to take her trifling carcass out of he kitchen and keep it out; but she had appeared for vork bright and smiling the next morning. Aunt Nancy was baffled. Her nerves were bad again: they vere caught in the jangling cross-currents of expecta- ion and disappointment—expectation of Hugh's ar- ival and disappointment at Bert's departure. When verything had been planned for the autumn wedding, Bert had announced that he was being transferred to he New York office of his cotton firm and that it vould be advisable to postpone the marriage until pring. In this period of stress and strain it would have been a pleasant outlet for Aunt Nancy's tensed nerves

to have been able to pick rows with the servants. But they wouldn't talk back. And if she ran them off, they came right back. It was all very strange.

◈ ◈ ◈

The days after Christmas were foggy and full of cold rain, but the new year came in with a spell of brilliant weather that toward the middle of January grew mild and balmy. A false spring was in the air and the south wind brought soft shower-clouds and rifts of burning sunshine. The fires at Malvern were allowed to die out, and the windows were opened all over the house.

From her room Sarah could see that buds were beginning to show on trees and shrubs. Along the terrace paths the tender shoots of hyacinth and jonquil had thrust themselves up, and the flowering quince at the edge of the lawn was opening scarlet blossoms. The air in the daytime was full of the spring whistle of red-birds and trembled at night to the unseasonable chanting of peepers.

Maum Molly went about the house shaking her head. It was worrisome, this untimely spring. It was a fraud and a lie and no good could come of it. The flowers and the trees and the birds were being deceived into putting forth too soon, and perhaps the young missie would be deceived, too. It was a bad time for birthing, a treacherous time. Dark spirits were loose in this crazy kind of sunlight; it was a good time to be taking a strong brew of witch tea and not depending on a Charleston doctor. Yes, Lord, there was no telling what might come of nature's lying like this: if you did birth a child safe, you couldn't rightly say

hat kind of a child he would turn out to be; he ight be a runt or foolish. Bad, bad weather. The uicker it turned cold like it should be, the better it ould be for everybody, excusing the devil. Great od, yes.

But Maum Molly did not succeed in infecting her oung missie with her own vague fears. To Sarah it emed that the Father whom she trusted had arnged a propitious season for her.

The season lasted for almost a fortnight, and one ternoon near its close Ned brought Dr. Porcher up om town on the *Vagabond*. There had been agoizing delays, and it was late when they reached Malrn. Aunt Nancy met them in the hall with the dings that Hugh, with the help of Maum Molly, ad preceded them by fully an hour.

◈ III ◈

HUGH was nine years old when his first sorrow came to him. Things that hurt had happened before—plenty of them; but they were just plain pain For example, there was the Saturday not so many months before when the boys in his class at schoo had come out to Malvern for a day of hare-and-hound and battle. He had escaped from the prison of th old rice mill and had been running through the gar dens with Brewt Waring in hot pursuit when he ha tripped on the edge of a rose bed and come down o a closely pruned bush, a thick prong of which ha pierced his arm to the bone. Then before that wa the time when he had been building a house in th big live-oak by the mill pond with Wade, Maur Molly's grandson and his comrade in all plantatio adventures, and had slipped and landed flat on h back. And once he had caught a fish-hook in his fin ger and June, Wade's father, had had to cut it ou with a knife. And once—just once—Mother ha spanked him with the back of her ivory hairbrush.

But this was different. This was a new kind o pain, something that took hold of you way insid somewhere and tightened and tightened till yo could hardly breathe. Aunt Lottie was gone. And n gone away on one of her periodic visits to the Nort and other foreign places to be a traveling-companio to rich old ladies as she had been doing ever since h could remember; but gone away forever to a pla

ılled Heaven, which Maum Molly said was way, way
p yonder above the sky and was all one great big
lantation a thousand times bigger than Malvern and
l made of gold and diamonds as big as your head
ıd nothing to do from one day to the next except
easure yourself with Maussa God in the Big House
ıd walk-talk with young Maussa Jesus. Some day
you were good, you would be bound to see Aunt
ottie again in that Heaven. That was some comfort,
know that you would see again her white teeth
ıd beautiful soft eyes, the golden hair that she was
ways brushing and the pink nails that she was always
olishing in her perfumed room, where it made you
little dizzy to go; and you would hear her voice
gain, reading to you or telling you wonderful tales of
e strange faraway places where she had been.

On the day of the funeral Hugh was allowed to go
r a minute or two into the living-room, where Aunt
ottie was lying in a long black box in front of the
replace. There were people in the room standing in
tle groups. Some of the faces were familiar: Aunt
laude, whose husband was the Uncle Stephen that
ıd died of fever in the war in Cuba; and another was
randfather Cranston, who had a long white beard
ıd a fat gold watch with chimes like St. Michael's
ıd was so deaf from sleeping on the ground in the
Var Between the States that he was always talking
out that you had to shout close to his ear to make
m hear; and there were other faces that Hugh knew.
is mother and father were not in the room, but
randmother Sheldon was, with a long black veil.
ıe took him straight to the box and let him look in.
unt Lottie was lying there just as if she were taking

her afternoon nap in the hammock under the ced trees on the lawn. Her lips seemed to be faintly sm ing just as they used to. But her cheeks had no pi color: they were wax-white like the lilies and cam lias that lay all around. Those were the flowers th Mother and Father had been talking about so mu upstairs. They were from Uncle Bert and Aunt E lyn up north in New York.

Grandmother was sniffling into her handkerchi and that made Hugh's eyes sting. But he could cry before all the people. It was not until he was o of the house and in the carriage that was taking h and Maum Molly away for the day that he could g way to the suffocating feeling and sob to his hea content against Maum Molly's soothing breast.

◈ ◈ ◈

One night several months after the funeral a w derful thing suddenly happened that made Hugh f get the lingering Aunt Lottie sorrow: his father t him that they were going to New York during Christmas holidays; Grandmother was not going, Mother was. At first it was too much to believe, it did actually come true.

Two weeks before Christmas it started. The v age up the coast was a confusion of terrifying wa of seasickness, of cold cabins, and of a three-piece chestra that played over and over again selections the awful rolling made all sound very much alike. the end of the voyage came the astonishments of N York seen through the gray mists of the harbor. the air were the deep, terrible voices of ships and

bulous stuff snow came hissing down endlessly into
e oblivion of the water.

The city was a deafening kaleidoscope of people and
eets and cabs and tall buildings. There was a hotel
om with a thick red carpet and red curtains at the
indows; very peaceful except that under each win-
w was a thing called a radiator that made funny
ises and made Hugh feel sweaty when he stood
oking out at all the snow-covered roofs and down
e dizzy distance to the street. There were elevators
at shot him up and dropped him down and made
m catch his breath when they stopped. Once he
sped out loud and all the grown-up people in the
vator smiled and it made him feel hot even after
got out of the hotel into the cold air.

Cabs were always being gotten into or out of—cabs
th padded insides that were muffled and snug when
e doors clumped closed. In the mornings the cabs
pped at stores, all kinds of stores, not like the shops
Charleston but enormous noisy places with rows
d rows of counters loaded with so many different
nds of things that it made Hugh feel dazed to keep
oking. In the afternoons the cabs drew up in front
more stores and museums and famous buildings.
ne afternoon Mother took him to see an opera called
agner. It was very bewildering; he would much
her have stayed with Father, who had gone to a
ub to meet Uncle Bert.

Hugh saw Uncle Bert the first day in New York.
ere was a knock on the door of the hotel room and
en Father answered, in came Uncle Bert. He
oked finer than ever. First he shook hands and

joked with Father and they patted each other, an
then he put down his cane and yellow gloves and toc
off his gray derby and gave Mother a hug and kis
Last came Hugh's turn and it was a lift off his fe
and a squeeze that almost took his breath away. Aft
that Uncle Bert took his overcoat off, talking all t
time, and underneath was a gray cutaway with a y
low flower in the buttonhole. Everybody sat dow
and Hugh stood in front of Uncle Bert's chair feelir
very flushed while Uncle Bert looked him up a
down with a smile that pretended to be a frown.

"By George, Sarah, this rascal of yours is growi
up like a weed! Ned, old man, isn't there somethi
you can do about this?"

Mother hardly smiled; she looked out of the w
dow, and her hands were restless. But Father laugh
a good loud laugh. Then Uncle Bert put an a
around Hugh and gave his nose a pull.

"Boy, that's a Sheldon nose you've got there. A
a Sheldon chin. Sheldon eyes, too. Have you
the Sheldon riding legs? That's the ticket!"

Hugh blushed and wished something would hap
to draw attention away from him. But Uncle
asked him a whole string of questions before he
through. At last he got talking to Father and Mot
and Hugh was free to lean back against Uncle B
arm and look and listen comfortably. Uncle B
voice was nicer to listen to than ever, and he
stouter than he used to be, and his face looked re
He had a gold cigarette-case with long cork-tip
cigarettes. His hair was thinner on top, but it lo
all right. Uncle Bert was a great man: he was
you called a Wall Street broker, and Father sai

as making money hand over fist. Some day Hugh anted to be just like Father and Uncle Bert.

There seemed to be long pauses in the talk. Uncle rt was usually so jolly and full of fun and he had en like that when he had first come into the room, it now he just talked along seriously and stopped ery once in a while and kept taking cigarettes out the case. Father talked, but Mother hardly said a ord. It was funny.

Pretty soon Father got up and called to Hugh to me with him for a minute and see something. They ent into the next room and stood in front of the indow, against which the snow swirled and eddied. was a blizzard, Father said, and he pointed out the apes of buildings ghostly in the white blur. Father pt talking, but Hugh couldn't help peeping round to the other room. Mother was talking very fast id very seriously to Uncle Bert. Her hands were aking quick little motions. When she stopped ncle Bert's voice started, and then Hugh could catch atches of what they were talking about so excitedly. was something about Aunt Lottie. Whatever it as, Mother kept shaking her head, shaking her head.

A little later Uncle Bert went away. But Hugh saw m almost every day after that. He always brought lother flowers and Father cigars. Hugh began to onder where Mrs. Uncle Bert was—Aunt Evelyn, hom he had never seen; but he didn't like to ask, ecause Mother and Father didn't seem to like to talk out her. They didn't seem to like her. It seemed Hugh that he would like to see her; every Christ- as she sent a present almost as good as Uncle Bert's.

When this curious, away-from-home Christmas

came, Uncle Bert stopped in with two presents. On was a set of lead soldiers just like the Charleston ca alry troop that Uncle Bert had been captain of aft Uncle Stephen; the other was a book with wonderf pictures called *Treasure Island,* and inside was card from Aunt Evelyn that said: "Hugh dea wouldn't you like to go with me to the Hippodron this afternoon? Ask Mother. Love from Au Evelyn."

Hugh showed the card to Mother. Mother look at Uncle Bert, and he smiled; then she passed t card on to Father and said he must decide. Fath read the card and nodded.

Uncle Bert stayed for lunch and afterwards he to Hugh through the pillared lobby to the revolvi doors. Outside there was an icy wind that nipp Hugh's nose and ears, but it was only a minute's w before a carriage drawn by two high-stepping hor came up to the curb. The doorman in the bright r cloak opened the door and tipped his hat, and Un Bert helped Hugh in by the arm.

"Evelyn," he said to the lady inside, "here's Hug

The lady inside smiled such a big smile that twinkling eyes were almost shut. She gave him a kiss on the cheek as he slid back in the soft seat, a then he heard her say as she leaned across him tow the door:

"Keep after them for dinner, Bertie darling."

The door closed, and the carriage moved away i the stream of the street. Aunt Evelyn had so m fur round her that Hugh couldn't tell what she re looked like till she took her furs off in the thea She was big and a little stout like Uncle Bert, and

ir, ears, fingers, and arms shone with jewels that ught the light of the huge theater.

That was a memorable afternoon. The things that ppened on the stage were mixed up but wonderful. me of the scenes were so gorgeous that Hugh leaned rward in his seat with his mouth open, and some ere so funny that he laughed till he hurt. Aunt velyn laughed, too, and her laugh was so rippling d full that it was like some one singing quite loud, d all the people in the seats around stopped their vn laughing to look at her. The curtain was curved d came up out of the floor instead of down from ove. At one time there was a whole herd of ele- ants on the stage, and during the intermission Aunt velyn bought a big box of candy. The last part of e show was the most wonderful of all: a whole owd of ladies, dressed in a great many more jewels an Aunt Evelyn but less clothes, marched down a ght of steps into a pond of real water in the middle the stage and disappeared below the surface and ever came up! Instead three fountains rose slowly om the water and spurted jets into the air, and ams of colored light came from all over the theater.

After the show Aunt Evelyn took Hugh in the car- age to a place where hundreds of people were hav- g tea at little tables set among palms. In the middle the room was a grove of palms with an orchestra side. Aunt Evelyn ordered tea for herself and milk r him and French pastry for both. There were so any different things on the pastry platter that it was rd to choose. Aunt Evelyn said he must take at ast two, so he picked out a cream puff with choco- te on top and a thing called a meringue, which was

crunchy and good. Aunt Evelyn took a meringue because, she said, all the other things had either whipped cream or chocolate.

"I cahn't," Aunt Evelyn said, "take eyether whipped cream or chalklate without upsetting my stummick."

Aunt Evelyn talked harsh, funny Yankee talk; and yet she made fun of the way he talked. She made up for that, though, by saying she really loved his Charleston way of talking.

"I'll bet," she said with a big wink, "that voice will be breaking many a young lady's heart before long."

Hugh felt his neck and face turn to fire, but Aunt Evelyn threw her head back and laughed the big laugh that was almost like a man's. It was contagious, that laugh, and he had to laugh, too, for all his blushing. Aunt Evelyn was lots of fun: she was always laughing and joking.

Hugh began to feel ever so full with all the candy and pastry and milk. It was really painful sitting here waiting for Aunt Evelyn to finish her third cup of tea. When she lifted her cup, her little finger stood straight up like the flag pole on the stern of the *Vagabond*. The orchestra in the palms was playing the very same beautiful piece that Mother played on the piano at home and that Aunt Lottie used to sing.

"I know what that is they're playing now," he told Aunt Evelyn. "Aunt Lottie used to sing it and it's called 'Romance.'"

"Really?" Aunt Evelyn smiled. "Pretty, isn't it? . . . Sad, too. I don't care much for sad pieces as a rule."

Hugh sighed. It was sad, and it made him think of Aunt Lottie. He could almost hear her singing it

He was glad when they stopped playing it and began a new piece. Selections from a show called *Pinafore,* Aunt Evelyn said. And after that there was a waltz that she hummed out loud, until the last part, which he whistled for him.

Hugh thought he would never get back to the hotel, but when he did finally, it wasn't nearly so much of a relief as he had hoped. He still felt uncomfortably ill, and the fullness turned gradually into an ache. Mother gave him some peppermint on a lump of sugar, but he continued to feel so sick that he had to lie down and go without dinner. When Mother and Father had gone downstairs, he got up and went to curl up in the big armchair by the window. He forgot his ache looking out at the multitude of dark roofs and blurred trails of light. The radiator sang an endless sizzling lullaby. . . .

Between sleeping and waking he heard the voices of Mother and Father mingling with the Hippodrome-Aunt Evelyn voices of his dreams, and presently he felt himself being lifted and carried and tucked into bed as he used to be when he was a very little boy.

Hugh saw no more of Aunt Evelyn until New Year's Day. In the morning Mother went to call on some Charleston people that were also in New York, and he went cab-riding on what Uncle Bert called The Avenue. It was slushy and clammy cold, but Uncle Bert and Father didn't seem to mind the weather; they laughed and joked all the time. Every now and then they stopped at some big hotel or club, and Uncle Bert and Father had tall glasses of something and he had steaming hot chocolates till he couldn't

hold any more. At last they came to a park, and Uncle Bert told Hugh that for every white horse he could spot while they were riding through here he'd get a silver dollar. That made a great game: Uncle Bert and Father got just as excited as he did, and when the cab came back to The Avenue, he had eight jingling dollars in his coat pocket.

The cab stopped next at the door of a big restaurant. Uncle Bert and Father argued and laughed to see who would pay the cabman; then they went in and there were Mother and Aunt Evelyn waiting together. They told Father and Uncle Bert that they were very late.

The dining-room was full of expensive, important-looking people all talking and staring around. It was wonderful but stiff, and Hugh knew at once that he must be particularly careful not to spill anything. Uncle Bert and Father quieted down a little, and even Aunt Evelyn didn't talk and laugh so much as before. All through dinner nothing very lively happened, except when the waiter opened a bottle of champagne and when the dessert came in—baked ice-cream! The conversation wasn't much fun to listen to; Aunt Evelyn kept talking to Mother, and Mother was nice to her, but nobody seemed to be having a good time. Except for the food part, Hugh was glad when it was over.

All at once New York was gone. It was night and he was lying in a berth that shook and rattled, flying through the darkness. The train made a great crying sound every once in a while like some tremendous mad beast fleeing from some terror. The cry echoed

in Hugh's heart and mind and filled him with such a deep nameless agitation that he could not close his eyes. At last he could stand it no longer. He climbed down from the upper berth and stood in the cold, swaying aisle. He put his mouth to the curtains of Mother's berth and whispered to her.

When he was wrapped tight in her arms, the howling cry became a faint, wistful, faraway call.

◈ IV ◈

AT Malvern time made a pleasant pattern of the seasons. Like the river the year had a rhythmic ebb and flow. The tide of the year came flowing in with the spring, swelled to flood at the peak of summer, and then in autumn ebbed away to winter.

For Hugh school cast a wide shadow over the year, obscuring if not all at least most of the precious days. True, school was not altogether dark: it was like the great shadow that the great old oak made on the river lawn at home—tatters of sunlight came through here and there. In class something funny or interesting would happen now and then, there were a few friendly teachers, and occasionally some subject would grow for a space unexpectedly thrilling; each day carried in its heavy ashes the quick spark of recess hour and the high free flames of afternoon games. But for the most part school was a long dull rigmarole, a sort of atonement that had to be made for being young, a penalty that had to be paid for the joyous little interludes at week-ends and the emancipation of vacations. School did its best to spoil autumn, winter, and spring.

It couldn't touch summer. Summer was the time. Just as the June heat was beginning to settle over the low-country, school released its grip and humdrum days were gone for a time. Then came two or three days of breathless rushing around while the house was prepared for its summer slumber. Furniture had to be covered and pictures, crystal chandeliers wrapped

tissue paper, windows boarded and hangings taken wn, silver packed in two big trunks and sent to town be kept in the bank that Father was director of; the carpets had to be rolled up, and two men came m the plantation phosphate mines to help old Jim th the heavy work such as hanging up the rowboats their shed. At last the morning of departure wned on Malvern; but already the *Vagabond* was aming down the river between the green marshes here the rice-fields used to be; and to Hugh, taking s last look back, the old house was half hidden by e black smoke trailing astern and by the flag flut- ring in the wind that made such rapturous secret under in his ears.

At the station in Charleston the seven o'clock train as waiting. When Hugh walked past the panting ngine, he felt a great shiver run up his spine, a ting- ng sensation part joy and part terror. An engine as a wild live thing; its breath was hot and impatient. [e was beginning to love its cryings, particularly at ight when its voice was a long faraway call—beauti- il, mysterious, vaguely sad.

Summer was the time. Long days of crisp moun- in air, of climbing steep mountain trails and scram- ling over rock ledges, of bicycling along the village oads and riding over the bridle-paths, of canoeing and onvulsive plunging and swimming at the icy little ake, of tennis and ball. Up with the sun and to bed oon after dark, deliciously jaded. For comrades there vere more than a dozen boys, and for an audience nd occasionally for a party there were the usual girls o make the boys feel hot-and-cold, jealous, or exalted —at all events unnatural. Mother was always in the

background to make things happy and smooth, and Grandmother was there, a little too full of questions and don'ts, but a great person to tell stories or play a game of jack-straws or snatch-the-bundle before bed.

Father was always coming and going. He would stay for a week or so and then business would call him back to Charleston, where he stayed at a hotel or with Grandfather Cranston and Aunt Maude. Sometimes he seemed worn out when he came up from the torpid low-country, but he soon recovered his spirits in the fresh mountain air and was the best of all companions on hikes and rides, better than any boy, better even than Mother. He liked to explore, to blaze new trails, to hunt in the tangled wilderness of Hog Mountain, where you had to wear leggings on account of rattlesnakes; he could tell the name of any tree or any kind of rock, could make a whoop that echoed for miles, and knew where there was an abandoned emerald mine and a place where a whole slope glistened with flecks of mica; he knew every family in the Winfield clan of mountaineers and each member of every family by his first name and he never missed an opportunity to stop in for a chat at one of the Winfield cabins. It was the best fun in the world to be with Father when he stopped for a chat at the home of George Winfield, chief of the clan. That was a two-story house, not a cabin like the rest, and it was nestled in the little valley that lay just beyond the forest slope that rose behind the Sheldon cottage. You climbed a long steep trail until you came to the tilted meadow at the top of the slope and then you went down past a spring that bubbled in a grove of poplars and pines and rhododendrons, down through fields

corn until you came to a brook that sang softly r pink and gold pebbles, and then you went over ittle plank bridge, and there in a frame of maple l chestnut trees and hundreds of dahlias was the nfield house.

The parlor inside was damp and smelly, but on a le in the middle of the room next to a big Bible l a lamp with a green shade was a thing you put uble-picture things in and looked through tiny win-ws and saw foreign scenes—France and Japan and ces Aunt Lottie used to tell about. And over the ntelpiece, under a picture that said *What Is Home ithout A Mother?*, there was an old-fashioned flint-k that Mr. Winfield would take down and let you ld. Mr. Winfield had a beard stained with tobacco ce and a wife and three big sons and a girl named nie with pigtails. The girl hid her face if you so uch as looked at her; she was silly. The others liked joke and tell stories after Father got them going. r. Winfield always brought out a jug of cider and ured father as many glasses as he would drink. Mrs. Winfield always went down to the spring-house for pitcher of milk that was really cream, and by the ne the visit was over Hugh was so full he could ardly walk home.

Once on the way back from the Winfields' Hugh d his father stopped to rest in the high meadow. hey stretched out on the grass under an old wind-visted apple tree near the bubbling spring, and Hugh sted his head on his father's arm. The day was reach-ng toward sunset; already the wispy clouds over the ountains to the west were taking fire. Purple haze as stealing over the great valley to the south, and

the great mountain beyond had lost its crown of sunlight. Beyond that great mountain lay the South Carolina up-country, and beyond the up-country lay the low-country and Malvern.

"Dad, isn't home over yonder?" Hugh whispered, pointing. The pasture seemed to float in a vast hush that swallowed up the thin trillings of crickets and made it seem out of place to speak above a whisper.

"Getting homesick, son?"

Hugh pondered. "Guess I am—a little. But wouldn't the Winfields get homesick if they were sitting down in one of our fields? Reckon they love their home like we love Malvern and think it's just as good, maybe better."

"Do you love your home, boy?"

Hugh looked into his father's smiling eyes and tried to speak, but for some strange reason he could only gulp and nod. And then suddenly he felt his father's arms round him in a hug so tight that it hurt. He felt a big kiss on his cheek, and after that his face was pressing against his father's coat.

"Son," his father was saying in a low voice that seemed to come right out of his chest, "it's a good thing to love your home. It's a good thing to have a home like Malvern to love. Some day you'll realize more fully what that old house means, what it stands for." The low voice paused for a moment and then went on more slowly. "Son, we're all of us putting our hopes in you. We don't say much about it. It's hard to talk about, because . . . it's so deep down and vital. But I'm going to say a few things to you now, and you do your best to understand and remember them, will you?"

Yes, sir," Hugh whispered.

Well, in the first place, guard your name, son. rish it. Think of it as a name worthy of the best 's in you. When I was a boy I used to dream of oming one of these great scientists that are dis- ering such wonderful things—I wanted especially e a great doctor and discover cures for the diseases cause so much suffering. Somehow that ambition sidetracked, got lost. Well, at the time it would e meant a stiff sacrifice for the family to have sent to any kind of a medical school. But you're going ave all the opportunities I missed. It would make very happy, son, if you picked up that old ambi- n of mine. Do you think you'd like to be a great tor?"

Yes, sir," Hugh said in a very small voice.

Another thing. Keep your body clean and strong. e is very beautiful when you meet it with a sweet l fine body, heart, and mind. Going to talk to some more about this from time to time. If you ve any questions about yourself or this puzzling old rld bring them straight to me or your mother, and 'll see if we can't work them out. Always remem- , son, that we're all one. We share one another's ubles as well as joys. And now one last thing and t will be enough for to-day. Keep a stiff upper lip, . Never lose your nerve. Lose everything else if u must, but never that. If you can remember that e thing and always love your home and your family, l never worry about you. You'll be ready for any- ing."

Hugh saw that his father was getting up, and he t up, too, feeling very solemn. But his father's eyes

were smiling, and he smiled back. His father gav him a light thump on the chest.

"Look here, young man, it's about time you wer filling out that carcass of yours. I'm getting righ tired of waiting for you to grow up and take Malver off my hands."

Hugh grinned and followed his father across th meadow to the cottage trail.

◈ ◈ ◈

To get away to the mountains in the summer wa fine, but to get home was finer still. School swallowe Hugh up again, but even school didn't seem so ba at first, and there were the morning and evening ride on the *Vagabond*. She would carry him down th river, drop him at a landing near the Academy, an go on down to the Battery with Father; in the lat afternoon she would come up the river, greet him with an exciting little whistle, pick him up, and carr him home to Malvern. And sometimes he was al lowed to steer.

Special Sundays the *Vagabond* took Hugh to church and he could hear the chimes calling all the way. Th church part was tiresome: he had to sit stiff and stil so long that he ached all over; and after the servic there was always a lot of standing around and talking and he had to bow and smile and listen politely.

The Sundays he didn't have to go to church wer the best. Then he could bring out a boy for the whol week-end. It was usually Brewt Waring; there wer other boys that Hugh liked, but Brewt was the bes of them all. He was ugly, but he was strong and ful

fun. He could ride like the wind and play well
kind of game.
Grandmother said that all the Warings were ugly
homemade sin, but she was mistaken about Jean,
wt's sister. Jean was skinny, but she was the pret-
t girl in Charleston. On Friday afternoons when
gh went to the Warings' house to put on his white
eches and Buster Brown collar for dancing-school,
re was Jean in her fluffy pink frock and looking
ovely that it made his heart skip and he could find
hing sensible to say in reply to all her bright chat-
His head would swim pleasantly all through the
on, and when from time to time the opportunity
ne to place one white cotton glove tight against
n's back and take her hand in the other, the sensa-
n in his head became a positive dizziness that was
e looking down a cliff in the mountains or out of
nigh window in New York, and he would get so
xed up in his steps that Madame Charlouis would
p the piano, roll her eyes to the ceiling, and call
in her shrill voice:
"Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! Monsieur Shel-don,
-ce que vous ne savez pas compter? Un! Deux!
ois!—Réversez! Comprenez-vous? Ce n'est pas
e promenade, cette danse. Alors. Attention, s'il
us plaît."
Hugh would come blushing to his senses for a few
nutes and then lose himself again in Jean.
But Jean was after all a girl, and girls were good
just one thing—dancing-school. You couldn't
estle and ride and play real games with them; they
re too delicate. So when dancing-school was over

Jean was forgotten for a week, and Brewt took first place in Hugh's affections. They went straight from Madame Charlouis's to the wharf on East Battery where the *Vagabond* was waiting, and Jean was left to go home with Mrs. Waring or one of the other mothers.

The week-ends when he was not able to bring Brewt or some other boy out to Malvern, Hugh had to be content with the company of his plantation shadow, Wade, a grandson of Maum Molly and Old Jim. But that wasn't so bad—Wade was smart and lively. He could ride any horse or mule without a saddle, and his father, June the overseer, had taught him to paddle a dugout canoe, fish, hunt with a gun, and catch snakes with a forked stick. All the lore of the plantation was his, and from him Hugh learned little by little the deepest secrets of the river country. He was taller than Hugh, and he was not black but coffee-colored like his father; Maum Molly had taught him to keep himself clean and well-mannered, and he was the only one of the Quarter children that was ever allowed in the Big House.

Sometimes Hugh went with his mother or his grandmother to the Quarter on some errand. In the good old days before the War, Grandmother said, the plantation slaves had lived here, well-cared-for and happy; and even now most of the plantation negroes lived on in the rows of cabins under the grove of live-oaks, making a living by tilling on shares a few acres, by working in the phosphate mines, or by hiring out for any odd jobs in the neighborhood. Often living was hard, especially since work was growing slack in the mines and lay-offs were increasing; but somehow they all managed

get along, with the aid of their garden patches, their kens and pigs, their hunting, trapping, and fishing nd their White Folks, upon whom they never hesi- d to call in time of trouble and never called in n. They had to be taken care of and looked after, ndmother insisted, even if they were getting more ling and no-mannered every year.

Hugh seldom went to the Quarter alone, but he n went to Wade's house, which stood in a pretty ring near the river and midway between the Big use and the Quarter. When Old Jim and Maum lly lighted their pipes and got to telling stories ut the old days, it was better to listen to than even ndmother. They had so many stories to tell about old people and the old ways that they never had tell the same one twice, although there were some t Hugh begged to have told over and over again. never tired of hearing the ones about the War; rwards, on the way home, he would slash with a k at Yankee shrubs and trees until his eyes were d with scalding tears and his arm too weak to raise. m Old Jim's and Maum Molly's stories as well as grandmother's he began to piece together a vivid ture of the past of his family and Malvern.

◈ V ◈

WINTER passed and spring, and summer came again. It was a good summer in most respects: Brewt Waring's parents let him come up to Blowing Rock for all of August and September. But in one respect it was a bad summer, for Hugh's father came up only once during the whole season and then he stayed only a few days. He looked strangely tired and worried. From snatches of conversation that Hugh overheard between his mother and father and later between his mother and grandmother, he began to understand that something serious was happening, something about the phosphate mines. He heard his father say one night that the deposits in Florida and South America and the Tillman Tax were putting the Carolina mines out of business. What did that mean?

When autumn came and Hugh was on board the *Vagabond* going up the river on the way home, he saw what it meant. The tall gray phosphate factory was lifeless, and the great trenches that scarred lower Malvern were deserted. Father pointed them out to Mother and Grandmother and shook his head. Hugh wanted to ask questions, but he didn't quite like to. At last he decided to ask if the mines were closed for good.

His father put an arm round him and said with a smile:

"Afraid so, son. But we can't complain—they've served us very well. When we've invested what they've

id us and doubled our capital, we won't have to rry about—anything."

When Hugh looked at his mother, she smiled, too, d so did his grandmother. It was evidently all right er all.

The house was open and ready this time. Everying was the same. When he looked at himself in e tall gilt mirror between the windows in the livingom, his eyes were surprised. Everything was not the me. The crazy little mirrors at the mountain cottage d not told him about all this change. He had known at his clothes were getting tight, but he had not realed that he was growing so much. Even in his face ere was somehow an entirely new expression that ade him feel a little like a stranger to himself.

When his grandmother came into the room and saw m standing there, she opened the inside blind that as folded back into the side of the window alcove here the ink lines, the names, and the dates were. reat-great-great-grandfather Gilbert Sheldon, Grandother said, had made the first line, a low one that as labeled: *Charles Sheldon, aged 6 years.* When ugh stood with his back to the measuring place, the ne that Grandmother made behind the top of his ead came nearest to the line labeled: *Mark Sheldon, ged 12 years.* Grandmother started to say something, t stopped abruptly and kissed him instead. Her lips embled for a moment and then pressed together rmly.

"How tall is that?" Hugh asked her.

"Five feet and over," she told him.

"He was that at twelve," Hugh said. "And I'm irteen already."

"Your grandfather," she said as she took off her black gloves and loosened her bonnet strings, "was just six feet when I married him. I hope you'll attain that stature by the time you're twenty-one." She took off her bonnet and looked at the mirror to pat her hair. "If you attain your grandfather's mental and spiritual as well as his physical stature, you will have accomplished something, young man."

After supper that evening Hugh slipped away from the house and went through the dark strip of woods that flanked the grounds to the south. He wanted to see Wade and Old Jim and Maum Molly in their home; he had already seen them at the landing, but they were never quite themselves around the Big House. At their own fireside they laughed and talked naturally.

Old Jim was failing fast. His wool had been white and his gums had been toothless ever since Hugh could remember, but now his eyes were dimmed by twin cataracts, and the misery in his back had spread to his head. Still he managed to regain something of his former animation with which to welcome young maussa. Maum Molly was as vigorous as ever. Her animation seemed to increase rather than diminish with the years. She poured out an endless stream of exclamations and benedictions on her child. When Hugh was finally able to put in a word and ask how she was doing, she swamped him with another flood of delight. How was she doing? How could she be doing anything but the best with her white child growing up to be such a fine boy, bless God. Look at him would you! The sharp eyes in his head, the broad shoulders on him, and the good steady pins under him.

id shooting up like cotton weed after a shower. eat God, would you look at her white child!

'Come yere, Wabe," she called to her grandson, who od back grinning in the shadows away from the elight. "Jedus, I 'clare to gracious my white chil' is etchin' it ober my gran'chil'. Stan' back to back. yrtle, pass yere dat stick yonder, tittie, till I tes' 'em. ok yere! Great Gawd, honey, dey de same all two, true!"

Maum Molly burst into a great laugh. Now it uld be a pure race between Hugh and Wade. It uldn't be long now before they both put on long eeches.

"Le' me study you close, boy," she said, gripping ugh by the arms and looking sharply into his face, nich the firelight illumined. "Boy, you is de spit of u' pappy an' mammy."

" 'E de spit of 'e gran'pappy Mark," Old Jim mumed, leaning forward in his chair to peer close at ugh. "De pure spit."

"Maybe so," Maum Molly agreed, "but 'e take after ' Maussa Charles, too. 'E gwine look like eb'ry one 'e people, t'ank Gawd. Boy, you pure Sheldon, ty?"

"Reckon I am if you say so, Mauma," Hugh grinned.

They were still talking about the way he had sprung when he left a little later, and he felt very big and anly. But when he got out into the dark night—ubly dark after the bright, friendly light of the fire his assurance began to shrink. He had avoided askg Wade to walk back to the house with him, because e felt too big now for that sort of thing; but as he umbled along the lane through the black woods, he

wished that his pride had not been so strong. He felt very small now. Whistling helped a little, particularly by the wide space under the trees where all the plantation negroes had been buried since way back. Wade and he had always run past this place, but he couldn't do that any more. A Sheldon wasn't afraid of anything.

He whistled as loud as he could to drive back the hideous shadow-shapes. His eyes were becoming used to the darkness now, and he thought he could see eyes glaring out at him from the gloom. Those eyes, he told himself, were nothing but the bits of glass and china that were strewn over the graves and gleamed dimly with the reflections of the stars. For all that they still remained eyes, and a cold sweat broke out on his forehead. At last he came out on the lawn. He tried not to walk too fast, but when he reached the landing of the river steps, he discovered that he was panting and gave himself a minute to catch his breath before he pushed open the door and went into the hall.

In the living-room Grandmother was crocheting and Father was reading to her from the *Confederate Veteran*. Mother was playing at the piano, and Hugh tiptoed to her and put his arms round her neck.

◈ ◈ ◈

That winter Brewt Waring spent many week-ends at Malvern. He and Hugh and Wade ransacked the plantation for amusement. One Saturday in February they came back to the house after an all-day expedition up along the river. It was late afternoon, and cold shadows were beginning to spread over the lawns. They were tired and hungry, but when they saw that

e *Vagabond* was at her mooring they forgot their tigue in a wild rush for the house. Hugh's father ways brought something home from town. Often was a long box of marshmallows to toast over the e.

They found him in the living-room, but there was mething in his appearance that halted them at the oor and silenced the shouts of greeting on their lips. e was standing unsteadily before the fireplace with ne hand gripping the mantelpiece; the other hand as holding tongs with which he seemed to be trying straighten a log. He still had on his overcoat and is hat. After a moment he looked round, and the ngs slipped from his hand and fell with a crash on ne edge of the fender.

The three boys stood with wide eyes in the doorway. Hugh tried to say something, but his voice caught in is throat. Something terrible, something terrible was ne matter. His heart began to pound convulsively as e watched his father coming toward him with a funny waying walk. The face was smiling a little, but it as the color of ashes, and the eyes were blood-shot. he room was beginning to spin before Hugh's eyes.

"Well, boys," he heard a strange, thick voice say, glad to see you all. Brewt—that's your name. How re your mother and father, my boy?"

Brewt's voice said: "All right, thank you, sir"; and hen the strange voice that was surely not Father went on:

"Glad to hear it. Fine people. Know them well."

Hugh's heart stood still when he saw that his father vas staring straight at him now. Then it began to eat again furiously as he felt on his shoulder his ather's hand, heavy and unsteady as his voice.

"Son," the voice said. "Bad news."

The blood that roared in Hugh's ears made the words sound far off. For a minute everything went black, and when sight rushed back to his eyes, his father was lying on the floor at his feet.

The next thing Hugh knew he was running upstairs. He pushed open the door to his mother's room.

"Mother!"

But that was all he could tell her.

◈ ◈ ◈

Hugh tried hard to forget that day, but it kept coming back and back. School and play numbed the pain transiently; when they were over, it would return—the picture of his father lying on the living-room floor —and hot shame and pain would throb through him. He was not able to review the scene in detail; his mind balked at that. There was only the single image of his father lying face down repeating itself again and again and again like rain dripping from the eaves at Malvern. It haunted the days, this image which was so terrible and so mysterious, about which no explanations were offered and none, he knew, must be asked.

It was a slight relief to Hugh that soon after the thing happened, his father went to New York; it had made him feel like hanging his head to be with his father. The mood of anxiety that had come over his mother and grandmother the summer before and then had lifted returned now deeper than ever. Sometimes his mother came to the table with eyes red from weeping; often he noticed that when he went into a room where his mother and grandmother were, they stopped

their talking. This, too, made him feel like hanging his head. The days had become full of sadness and bewilderment.

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Spring spread over Malvern with its magic of rebirth, its disturbing exhalations, and its myriad enchantments for eye and ear. It was April again. But it was like no April that Hugh had ever known before. Over the house hung a sense of depression that was as heavy as it was mysterious. Father was back from New York, but he was like a ghost. He brought no word from Uncle Bert and had hardly a word to say about his trip. At the table conversation kept falling into silences, and Hugh made himself talk to drive away the nameless shadows that seemed to be striving to press in and engulf them all; when he could think of nothing further to say, he felt like groaning as he stole glances at the faces of his father, his mother, and his grandmother.

There was another respect in which that April differed from all the others Hugh had known. The house was full of shadows, but outside the lawns and gardens, the woods and the river, were enveloped in a vast golden haze that made Malvern seem like a place in a dream. Spring had never been so beautiful before —never. Familiar sights and sounds were transformed into things of surprise and wonder as if they were being seen for the first time, and even on the stillest days a hundred secret winds met in a happy turmoil wherever Hugh happened to be. It gave him a feeling of glorious joy; it was like being in some high swing that soared over Malvern and the river, over the mountains, and seas and islands of the world, up and up

to the sky, and then swooped down to Malvern and soared again.

These April days Hugh liked to lie on the thick green carpet of the terrace, looking out over the wide marshes. The sun was hot but it felt good and burned away all the poisons of gloom; it made the blood tingle in his veins. Underneath the bedding of grass was the cool soil, and he could feel its firmness against the pressure of his body. The soil of Malvern, his soil, the soil that had given him birth; he could feel its strength flowing up into him, spreading to his finger-tips and toes. The magic winds bore over him the overwhelming fragrances of the deepening spring. . . . Looking out at the shining silver ribbon of the river he was filled with an ecstasy more acute than any he had ever known.

Thus that April presented itself to Hugh in two sharply contrasting forms: the one, a vague and bitter shadow; the other, a vague and rapturous light. Then as April passed into May came the blow that crushed all moods into one profound grief.

It was a bright Sunday morning. Hugh had breakfasted early with his grandmother and had gone with Wade down to the landing to loiter round the *Vagabond* until the time came to dress for church. They had been there only a short while when they saw their fathers coming down from the house. Both had shotguns. It was a funny time to go hunting, Hugh thought.

While June was putting the guns and a pair of oars into one of the rowboats, Hugh was asking his father if he and Wade couldn't go, too. His father shook his head: they were going to lower Malvern to look for

e poachers that had been killing deer, and it was no ip for boys. Then he put his arm round Hugh and ew him over to the other side of the wharf. To ugh it seemed several minutes that his father stood oking intently at him before he spoke. When he d at last speak, his voice was very low, almost a whis-er, but it seemed more eager and full of life than it ad been for weeks:

"Son. Do you remember a talk you and I had once ip in the Winfield pasture in the mountains?"

Hugh nodded.

"Well, I just want you to promise me to always emember that little talk. If you'll do that,—you'll hake me very happy. That's all. . . . Son."

Hugh nodded again, wondering what his father neant by saying that. A few days ago Grandmother ad said: "Hugh, your father is a sick man." He was sick man. But now he was smiling his old reassuring mile. Perhaps he was getting well again. Hugh felt is father's hand patting his shoulder and his father's ips pressing for a moment against his own. Then, perplexed and flushed, he stood watching his father nd June get into the boat and push off into the cur-ent. The tide was ebbing, and the boat glided far before June got the oars into the oarlocks and began o row: it swept rapidly downstream, and in a minute or two the glint of the gun-barrels in the prow was lost in the blinding sparkle of the water, so that Hugh had to squint his eyes to see. As the boat reached the bend in the river, he caught the wave of his father's arm above the flashing waters, and he raised both hands to wave back, feeling a sudden unaccountable agony and an absurd desire to call out to him.

Hugh drove his mother and grandmother to St. Andrew's that morning. A minister from Charleston had come out to conduct services at the parish church. He was very fat and warm and he smiled every once in a while right in the middle of his sermon. Hugh sat between his mother and grandmother, and when they got up, he held the hymnal, but he couldn't trust his voice to sing. Most of the people round him he knew but hadn't seen for a long time. He felt that they were looking him over, taking his measure, and he stood very straight; but he couldn't help feeling that he was all arms and legs these days. Next birthday his father had promised him long trousers. . . .

After church there was the usual exchange of salutations with Mother smiling and saying a word to every one and Grandmother hanging to his arm and saying to people: "You know my grandson, of course, Mrs. So-and-so." It seemed to Hugh hours before they started for home. He made the horses trot most of the way back the River Road. His mother sat with him on the front seat of the surrey because, he knew, she did not yet entirely trust his driving. As he turned in at the gate to Malvern, he saw that Wade was coming along the avenue on horseback. Before he had time to more than wonder what was up, Wade was beside the carriage shouting:

"Miss Sa'ah! Maussa Ned done got shot! 'E trip on somet'ing an' 'e gun shot 'e ches' off! June brung um back home!"

Hugh met his mother's eyes for an instant. He felt the reins being taken out of his hands and heard the crack of the whip. The surrey was plunging through the sun-flecked avenue. From behind came the shrill

errogation of his grandmother's voice, which he was
o stunned to answer, and ahead rushing toward him
is the end of the avenue and the house where his
her would be lying dead. Dead.

◈ ◈ ◈

On Sunday morning a week later Hugh was walk-
g through the gardens on the way back from the
antation graveyard, where his father was now resting
ith the others, when the stunned sensation of the past
eek began to lift and he found himself facing at last
e full pain of his father's death. The world had
l come toppling down and lay in ruins at his feet,
d he despaired of its rebuilding. Still he must follow
e example of his mother. Her world had crashed,
o, but she had never once flinched after that first
ock when she had come into the hall and seen the
dy on the settle. Even then she had not cried; she
d just pressed her hand to her breast and gasped.

Yesterday she had walked with him and talked, ex-
laining many dark things. He understood a little
tter now in what a desperate state affairs were. His
ther's company had been one of the first forced out
the dying phosphate industry: that had started all
e trouble. Then Dad had put all his money in stock
vestments at Uncle Bert's advice. A great panic had
me and wiped away everything in a few short days.
n top of that had come Dad's accident and death,
nd now there was nothing left but Malvern, which
ad been mortgaged and was saved by Dad's insurance
oney.

Hugh paused in his strolling and stretched his eyes
cross the river. The ugly gray phosphate plant rose

above the trees on the far shore. Its time was over now; it had served well for a time, but at last it, too, had failed. Like a phantom, its upper part almost invisible against the blue-gray of the horizon, it seemed already to be dissolving into the air. And the *Vagabond,* she must go; and the cottage at Blowing Rock after this one more summer. After that? Mother had said not to worry, everything would come out all right —somehow. . . . From the house Hugh could hear his grandmother calling to him.

◈ VI ◈

AMONG Charleston ladies sitting over their tea-cups and Charleston gentlemen sitting over their glasses, Malvern and the Sheldons had commenced to form a topic of frequent discussion. What was Sarah Sheldon going to do?

It was agreed that there were only two courses opened to her: either she must sell out or make the place yield an income. Those unfortunates who had been compelled by one exigency or another to give up their ancestral homes on the rivers and sea-islands shook their heads gravely. It was a losing fight. She might just as well surrender at once and retrench in town as they had. To be sure, Malvern would bring only a modest sum; one of the Yankee sportsmen who were beginning to pick up low-country plantations would bid it in for a few thousand, or one of the new pulp companies. But she could get enough for it to live on if she were careful, and what else was there to do? A man might conceivably wring a living planting Malvern and tenant farming with don't-care niggers; but a woman, high-strung and delicate, could never hope to manage that. No, it was the end of the Sheldons. They had fought off the evil day longer than most of the feudal families, but now they, too, must bow their heads, must abandon Malvern and fall back on a grubby respectability in the town. Of course, Bert Cranston could hardly fail to offer his sister help, but her pride would never permit her to accept help

from any one, least of all the husband of Evelyn Brady. It would be exciting, all agreed, to see what Sarah Sheldon would do when her respite in the mountains was over and she came back at the end of the summer to face the situation.

It was impossible that autumn for some time after the Sheldons return to Malvern to find out definitely what was developing there. Rumors were as plentiful as sugar in Charleston teacups, but like the sugar they dissolved with a little stirring. Neither the elder nor the younger Mrs. Sheldon came to town, and those friends who made the journey to Malvern were rewarded with nothing more than the old hospitality, Nancy Sheldon's usual *grande dame* (which every one said ought to be toned now that she was penniless), and Sarah Sheldon's warm charm (which every one said was splendidly kept up considering the anxiety she must be suffering in her present predicament). Even the most adroit strategists found themselves balked by the polite evasions of the two women.

It was Mrs. Waring who hit upon the idea of cross-questioning Hugh, now back at the Academy. She instructed Brewt to invite Hugh to spend the night as soon as possible; but a cooling of friendship between the two boys delayed this event. At last, however, Hugh came, and Mrs. Waring had her opportunity at dinner.

"Tell me about your blessed mother," she beamed at him. "And your dear old grandmother. I haven't seen either of them since last spring. I'm told they look very well after their summer in the mountains."

"They're both all right, thank you, ma'm," Hugh told her in the new deep voice that sometimes betrayed

him by going treble; then he remembered: "They sent their love to you all."

"Your dear mother and I," Mrs. Waring said, "went to Miss Pringle's school as girls. That was in the terrible years after the war when people were not sure where their next meal was coming from and so many of the old plantations had to be sold."

Mrs. Waring paused. She had not intended coming so directly, so clumsily to the point. She veered off and approached again with more subtlety. But when dinner was over, she was obliged to face the fact that she had been able to draw from Hugh nothing more tangible than a good many flushes and several I-really-don't-know-ma'ms. Well, she could at least have the satisfaction of telling people what a mannerless blockhead Sarah Sheldon's boy was turning out to be. As for his leaning toward Jean, that had better be discouraged from now on. She would make a good match some day; perhaps a wealthy outsider. Family was all very well, but after all money was so much more—well, useful.

Certain of the Sheldon affairs were common knowledge. Every one knew that not only had the *Vagabond* been sold but even the rowboats and the little sailboat. The Blowing Rock cottage was gone. The Malvern stables were almost empty again; all the hunters had been sold and all but two of the saddle and carriage horses. Finally, Motes, the Sheldon butler, had been sent to town for work. He had been snapped up at once by the rich Misses Sausser, three gaunt and slightly unwashed virgins, who inhabited a large Victorian-Georgian residence on Meeting Street and had a finger in every Charleston pie from the St.

Cecilia Society and the charities to the Citizens' Bank and *The News & Courier*. This formidable trio, christened "The Unholy Trinity" by some impious wag but commonly referred to as the Three Fates, held in the spaces behind their sharp hazel eyes the entire lore of the city—past, present, and in some cases future. For them space beyond Carolina was little more than a void—except of course for England, the Mother Country, and Richmond, the Capital of the Confederacy. The intersection of Meeting Street and Broad was the cross-roads of the world; St. Michael's spire marked the center of the universe, and her chimes were the music of the spheres. In their somewhat confined cosmos they allowed nothing to escape them; no Charleston sparrow fell without their notice and they had numbered the very hairs on their neighbors' heads. It was, accordingly, not to be marveled that they looked upon Sarah Sheldon's failure to disclose her affairs to her peers as both a discourtesy and a challenge. The fact that Emily, the youngest and in relative sense the comeliest of the sisters, had once been in love with Ned Sheldon gave an added zest to the matter.

When the Sheldon butler went into the service of the Misses Sausser, all ears were pricked to expectant attention. Every one guessed that it was not Motes's ability alone that had won him his new place; it would not be long before the private affairs of the Sheldons would be every one's business. Charleston's inner circle waited impatiently, wondering who would be the person first honored with the news. Would it be Mrs. Ravenel, Mrs. Rutledge, or Miss Heywood at the library? Would the favored one be called on or bidden

to tea? Here was material for boundless speculation.

Autumn swung toward Christmas, and nothing happened. Christmas came, and the clanging tongues of St. Michael's bells set the frosty sea air eddying with old carols; but still the tongues of the Three Fates remained sealed—at least on the subject of the Sheldons. Then at last on New Year's Day certain representative persons received invitations to dine with the Misses Sausser on the following Friday.

When the important hour arrived, carriages drew up before the house on Meeting Street and discharged the chosen few. One carriage came from Legare Street, one from Church, two from Tradd, and one from the Battery. William, the jealous servitor of the late Governor Sausser, was forced to share with Motes at the door the quiet greetings which Those Who Belong customarily give to the ancient retainers of Those Who Also Belong and which is a little like the understanding nod and smile that one gives on formal occasions to old friends. Motes was, in fact, the cynosure of all eyes and the secret guest of honor.

Dinner that night was done in the grandest Sausser manner, and even those who possessed much older silver, china, and crystal and ever so much older lineage (the Sausser name had not emerged from obscurity until after the Revolution) were inclined to admit that no manner was grander. The oyster soup was superb; the sweetbreads, cooked with sherry under glass, were delicious; the turkey was done to perfection; a consummate pineapple aspic was followed by ambrosia and angel cake that were, indeed, heavenly. The wit that accompanied the courses was, like the wines, of an old and excellent vintage. After a full two hours

at the table the ladies retired to the drawing-room, where they were joined in an unusually short time by the gentlemen. Motes and the pouting William passed the coffee that Julia, eldest of the Fates, poured; the room was vibrant with suspense. When the last cup had been deliberately poured, Miss Julia looked around her for silence, which she was instantly accorded.

"Sarah Sheldon," she announced with a calmness that her gleaming eyes contradicted, "is going to plant rice."

The long high tension burst like a sky-rocket at its zenith and dropped down sparkling stars of exclamation. Eyes glanced approval at Motes for being the means of clearing up the mystery of Malvern. But, as a matter of fact, information had come to the Fates from quite a different source. Motes had parried every vital question put to him by his new White Folks in regard to his old; the sisters were not able to decide whether it was ignorance or loyalty, but whatever it was, it was stubborn, and they had been compelled to seek information in other directions.

It was Maude Cranston, Stephen's widow and Bert's sister-in-law, who had supplied the solution to the Sheldon riddle. Since the death of Grandfather Cranston, Maude had been living with her daughter in an untidy little house on lower King Street. They kept one servant, a great gorilla of a woman, who was mild as milk when she was herself but the terror of the neighborhood when she was in her cups. It was considered hazardous to call at the Cranston house, and this coupled with the fact that they were generally disliked and took roomers of a low order practically isolated them from the company of their equals. Cer-

tainly the Fates would have been the last persons under ordinary circumstances to have called on Maude Cranston. But the woman was a sister-in-law of Sarah Sheldon and she had been out to Malvern for Christmas; she would unquestionably know what was going on there. And so the Fates had called, had had tea served by the gorilla (who was fortunately in the mildest of moods), and had invited Maude to tea the very next day, when they had cracked her open and extracted the rich kernel of gossip.

Now at the conclusion of their dinner they were able to give their guests every detail of the Sheldon story. Bert Cranston had persuaded Ned Sheldon to speculate, had shown him how he could convert a comfortable fortune of two hundred thousand into a cool million. Ned would never have to think of money again; he would be able to go anywhere, do anything. Bert had always been able to lead his cousin. The panic had come, and margins had begun to fade. Bert had refused help that he could easily have given, and Ned had borrowed money from the bank of which he was director. Malvern had been the collateral. At last everything had gone—not only his own money and all he could borrow, but his mother's modest funds and his wife's and a sum that Charles Sheldon had left to Hugh. A few days after the final break Ned Sheldon had accidently shot himself, and his heavy insurance had very handily saved Malvern from auction.

"He gambled for high stakes," Julia said to her little audience. "Luck was against him, and he took his medicine like a man and a gentleman—both of which he was to the highest degree."

The audience agreed.

"He was the last of the Sheldons," Emily pronounced with a toss of her head. "How can Sarah Sheldon be fool enough to think she can revive rice-planting and make it pay? She'll break herself to pieces in a season or two if she tries it. Why doesn't she accept the situation gracefully. Malvern's days are numbered."

"And what," put in Miss Rosa, the youngest and least of the sisters, "would the Sheldons be without Malvern?"

It was a good question,—particularly for Miss Rosa. What indeed, every one wondered, would the Sheldons be without Malvern?

◈ ◈ ◈

Charleston did not guess the energy and resourcefulness that resided in the person of Sarah Sheldon. They saw a slender, almost frail woman in her late thirties, a woman possessing the noble character of a "true Christian," and they understood completely with what anguish her heart must be wrung at the mere thought of giving up Malvern; but they had no idea that she could do anything to deflect the trend of circumstances. Family distress and tragedy was an old story in the low-country, which now in its age seemed to be paying for the glamor and glory of its youth. One should be prepared for anything, even the dissolution of the Sheldons of Malvern.

Sarah Sheldon had many friends, and they came to her with that outward sympathy and inward equanimity with which friends approach one in misfortune. Those that were well-to-do felt it quite safe to offer her financial assistance, knowing that she would re-

fuse; later, they told one another, when the struggle had humbled her pride a little, she would be glad to accept cast-off clothing and occasional baskets of food. When the expressions of sympathy had been bestowed, the majority of the friends girded themselves to gradually cut down to the decent minimum their social intercourse with the Sheldons. But they need not have given that matter a thought; Sarah Sheldon seldom came to town save for St. Michael's, and invitations to Malvern were rare. And so it was possible for the friends to sit back with the rest of Charleston and watch, from the outside as it were, the pathetic spectacle of Sarah Sheldon planting rice.

At Malvern the struggle to wrest a living from the river had already begun. Before Christmas Sarah had assembled all the negroes on the plantation and with the help of Old Jim and June had divided the wheat from the chaff. Those who were known to be too lazy and shiftless for the new project had been told that they must leave; the rest had been offered rice land to rent at ten bushels an acre.

"I am going to take charge myself," Sarah had told them from the landing of the river steps to the house, her white hands gripping the iron railing. "I am a woman with no resources behind me except this land where my fathers and your fathers have lived since long ago. I have no money to advance you. Nothing but the rice seed. But I am giving you the chance to share this land with me and to prove yourselves worthy of the name of free men."

They had responded with more enthusiasm than she had dared hope, and after the New Year festivities the work had begun in earnest. By the middle of March,

time for first planting, three hundred acres of marsh had been redeemed from the river. The old lines of the dikes had been rebuilt, the encroaching cypress knees cut away, the flood-gates reset, and the draining ditches redug. A double yoke of stout oxen drew the rice drill back and forth across the soggy fields, and Malvern seemed to have returned to its younger days. A few inches of water were allowed to creep over the planted fields, and presently, as spring ripened into summer, the wide expanses of water that mirrored placidly the sky turned from blue to green.

When the fever season came, Sarah Sheldon took a little cottage on Sullivan's Island and went to Malvern twice a week. It meant a tedious journey that began at daylight and included a trolley ride from the cottage to the ferry, another trolley ride across town to the Ashley River Bridge, and a walk across the bridge to the place where June was waiting with the buckboard. It would have been easier to have taken a cottage at the sand-hill village of Summerville, but Hugh loved the sea.

As summer deepened there came the threatening season of gales. The rice-field banks were not more than three feet above the level of the river at high water, and if a strong wind lashed waves against them, breaks were sure to appear. But at last this anxiety was safely passed, and the rich hazes of October lay like an aura over the green and gold of the harvest fields. The hands moved across the fields with their reap hooks, laying the golden heads carefully on the long stubble to dry until next day, when they were tied into sheaves with wisps of rice and stacked in cocks for a final drying. An old plantation flat, pro-

pelled by poles, carried the rice from the fields to the restored rice mill. There it was converted into bushels, and a month later the bushels were sold to a North Carolina grain merchant.

When Sarah Sheldon was able to catch her breath and take her bearings, she realized how tangible a victory she had won. Her first venture in rice planting had permitted her to put into the bank over two thousand dollars. But the struggle had left her weak and shaken; she was well acquainted now with the forces of nature that she must continue to subdue and bend to her will—the moody river, the soil, and the unreliable negroes, stubborn and earthy as the soil. Nature had been docile this year, but would it be next? She must increase the rice acreage, plant cotton and corn as well in the spring. During the autumn and winter she must husband her strength for the new test.

The days of autumn and winter were a blessing. Each morning she had breakfast with Hugh and drove him to the shack of a station, called "Malvern Hall," where he took the shambling little train that puffed leisurely to Charleston and school; and each afternoon at dusk she went to meet him. The time between was happily filled in the mornings with the automatic obligations of housekeeping, in the afternoons with sewing and books and the old Steinway. The evenings were no longer drugged for her with fatigue.

Grandmother, who was failing, went to bed at nine sharp now, and this was a relief to Sarah, for she saw how Hugh chafed under the insistent cross-questioning of a solicitude that was never satisfied until he had accounted in detail for his day. After the old lady had gathered herself together and said a final good-night,

Sarah waited patiently for Hugh to finish with his books and join her on the sofa before the fire. Then she could quietly share the little triumphs and disappointments of his day and smooth out the kinks, watching with the alert eyes of love his gropings toward maturity of body and spirit—smiling inwardly and tenderly at the unconscious distortions of adolescence and mingling her laughter with his when he told of something that had amused him. He was a strange mixture, this son of hers, a blending of many family traits, a bundle of contradictions, and at times a chaos of moods; but she foresaw what elements in his nature would finally take the ascendancy. She had faith that he would be gifted, strong, fine; she took it for granted that he would be a great physician as his father had wanted him to be, and it pleased her deeply to see that already he, too, took that for granted. He liked to stretch out on the sofa with his head in her lap and have her smooth his hair. And then as she studied in the firelight the features that were somehow Ned Sheldon's and somehow her own, a peace flowed over her that made of pain and sorrow less than the dancing fire-shadows.

◈ ◈ ◈

Charleston was astonished at Sarah Sheldon's success, astonished and very generally disappointed. They pretended that they were pleased; in reality they were chagrined that their prophecies of failure had been confounded. The Fates had given a whist-party to announce the bank deposit of the two thousand dollars and on that occasion Miss Julia had struck the keynote when she had delivered herself of the following:

"No one wishes Sarah Sheldon more success than I do. I admire her and love her. No one deserves greater happiness than she does. But it is well to remember that we are not rewarded in this life according to our virtues; nor for that matter punished according to our sins. And so I say that having made a go of it this year, Sarah had better tempt Providence no further. Malvern is doomed, and if its mistress is wise, she will accept that certitude and refrain from throwing her life and the last of her resources into the flames."

That Malvern continued to evade the doom that the Fates had prepared for it was the source of long annoyance in Charleston. As the years turned slowly by, events of local and world significance distracted the town's attention; but when they had gone, eyes came back to the plantation on the Ashley River, where a middle-aged woman was waging a desperate struggle with nature. Sometimes freshets and salt tides wiped away acres of the precious harvest, and one year a hurricane sent the turgid river on a rampage that swept away all the fields and left great gaps in the dikes. But the woman continued to hang on, and the bank account, the Fates reported, was increasing—irregularly but surely.

The summer after Hugh's graduation from the Academy the news leaked out (through obscure channels—much to the disgust of the Fates) that the boy was going to Princeton. To Princeton? Why, people had never heard of anything so absurd. Sarah Sheldon taking that burden upon herself! It was all very well to have a sentiment about sending your boy to the college that his grandfather had attended and his

great-grandfather, but under the circumstances it was simply preposterous. What was wrong with Charleston College? Was Hugh Sheldon such an exceptional student that the home institute wasn't good enough for him? It had been good enough for his father, and from all reports there was nothing exceptional about Hugh in the matter of studies or any other way. He had turned out to be an intelligent, gentlemanly boy, but after all there were several dozens of such in the city with names as honorable and some with much more money, who did not consider themselves too good for Charleston College or at least a Southern college. It was rank folly sending Hugh Sheldon to Princeton. There was something almost insolent about it.

◈ VII ◈

IT was the summer of 1914, and Charleston was, among other things, watching for the return home of Hugh Sheldon from his last year at Princeton. When the Fourth of July came without bringing him back from the North, the Fates, who were on the point of leaving for Virginia Springs, grew restless. The passing years, which had left the three sisters a degree gaunter and a shade more unwashed, had intensified their faculty for living vicariously the joys and sorrows, the loves and hates of their neighbors; the Sheldon chronicles was one of their favorite hobbies, and it was said that they knew more about the Sheldon past than Sarah Sheldon or the deceased Nancy Sheldon. It was not likely, then, that they could long tolerate ignorance of Hugh's whereabouts.

Accordingly there were two courses to choose from: they could either drive out to Malvern for a call or resurrect Maude Cranston. They decided on the former as being the more colorful procedure. Veiling themselves very thoroughly against the dust and shaded from the broiling sun by lavender parasols, they drove out from town in their victoria.

At Malvern a flock of sheep browsed on the lawn, overflowed onto the driveway, and impeded for several minutes the stately progress of the victoria. There was a further delay at the door—the proud retinue of servants had evidently been reduced to a single maid, who wore no cap and whose apron was by no means spot-

less—and a long wait in the living-room while the gir
went to look for her mistress. The long wait, how
ever, was not at all tedious, for it offered ample oppor
tunity for three pairs of eyes sharpened by chronic
inquisitiveness to take in details. Had Sarah Sheldon
disposed of any of the Sheldon heirlooms? Appar
ently not. The three pairs of eyes had time before the
mistress of the house appeared to penetrate to the
dining-room and even to the pantry. The furnishings
seemed to be intact.

When the Fates left Malvern that afternoon, they
left earlier than they had intended, for the air was
growing hazy with the sultriness that precedes summer
storms; but they left with their curiosity well satisfied.
They preserved an erect silence until the victoria passed
the gateway and turned into the River Road; then they
broke into a triple stream of comment that never
flagged all the way to town. Although the streets
dozed in the quivering heat and it was the hour for
siesta within jalousied verandas, the Fates drove at
once to a house on the Battery and rang the bell. A
few minutes later in a cool, darkened parlor they were
interrupting one another to tell their story to Mrs.
General Tredwell. Hugh Sheldon was at Bar Harbor,
Maine! That meant that he was visiting his Uncle
Bert. He was up there sporting among the rich
Yankees while his mother, looking like death but
smiling as brave as you please, was fighting for his
tuition at Johns Hopkins. It was fantastic, such
sacrifice.

The next day the Fates supplemented their visit to
Malvern by summoning Maude Cranston to tea. She
came, contributed her testimony, received in return

three dresses to alter for herself, and departed for another spell of oblivion. The Fates were now wholly informed. Evelyn Cranston had written to Maude that Hugh was making a great hit at Bar Harbor, that she was surprised that his mother had allowed him to spend the summer with the uncle and aunt that she refused to have anything to do with, and that the boy had gone native and lost his head over a Yankee girl with mountains of money. How the Fates wished they had pumped Maude before their call at Malvern! Still, they were well content, and the following week they departed for Virginia Springs with a choice bit of news on which to speculate.

In the meanwhile Sarah Sheldon was reading and rereading her last letter from Hugh. She carried it with her, read it when she stopped to rest on her inspection trips along the shrub-grown banks of the rice-fields, reread it before bed in the little cottage at Summerville. She could hear his voice saying over and over:

"I feel terribly guilty, Mother, being up here at this wonderful place of mountains and sea while you're down there in that hell. Sometimes I feel so ashamed that I want to hop on the train and go to you. I can't help thinking that there must be something I can do, but you keep assuring me that there is nothing and that you want me to rest and gather strength for Johns Hopkins. Please tell me again, dear. Make me believe I'm doing the right thing loafing here while you're slaving there. If you could only be here, I'd be so happy. Some day I'll bring you here. It's like our mountains and our sea rolled in one. Some day, Mother dear, I'll make up for all you've done for me.

I'm getting strong as an ox riding and climbing and swimming and playing tennis. Uncle Bert is Commodore of the New York Yacht Club you know and he has his record-breaking speedboat here tuning up for the regatta. Most of the boats in this harbor make the good old *Vagabond* look pretty cheap. Everybody has more money than they know what to do with. Isn't it silly? Uncle Bert is certainly a dandy. He wants me to be a broker and come into his firm, but I tell him I want to mend people not break them. He doesn't seem to get my point of view. It's a mystery to me why you and Uncle Bert don't get along, but I suppose it's because you don't like Aunt Evelyn. She has a good heart, but she certainly is awful in some respects, and I believe Uncle Bert is ashamed of her underneath, although of course he's too good a sport to ever show it. He keeps bringing up the thing about wanting to help us financially. He and Aunt Evelyn are both right stout now. Best love. Hugh."

A few days later Hugh Sheldon, at breakfast with his Uncle Bert and Aunt Evelyn, was reading the answer to this letter in his mother's clear, fine hand:

My dear boy,

I shall never be able to tell you how much your letters mean to me. It does me as much good to know that you are well and happy as if I were there myself. As for assuring you again that what you are doing is right, I can only remind you of what I told you when you wanted to work this summer—it is more important that you rest and gather strength than anything else you could do during these vacation months. I don't need you here; all goes

smoothly. It would simply sap your energy for you to be here now, without serving any good purpose. Rest assured on that score, and don't worry about me. To be able to give you a start and to preserve Malvern for you has been my sole aim these years since your father's death and my sole happiness. Any sacrifice I have made has been repaid a thousand times.

It was exceedingly kind of your Uncle Bert to invite you for the summer, and I am glad that you feel toward him as you do. There is no reason why the bitterness that I cannot dismiss from my heart should be passed on to you. As for accepting money from him, you must understand that we can never do that. I am sure that your uncle himself must realize this. Some time I shall talk to you of this in detail.

Bar Harbor sounds lovely. Take care of yourself and store up as much reserve as you can, for Dr. Porcher tells me your medical course will be very taxing. There is, I imagine, where you are a great luxury of living. It is an advantage to be able to see as much as possible of the world, but it is vital to keep a sense of balance and never to forget that character is the most important thing in life. It is of the utmost comfort to me to know that I need never worry about you on any score.

All goes well at home. I have enough wool from my sheep to make me a flannel suit for next winter, which will be a great help. I finished threshing the oats last week and I believe it will come to two hundred bushels—not a great amount but enough to pay for your text-books. The rice crop is the most

promising in years. God has indeed heard my prayers and—

Hugh skimmed the next pages. Plantation matters; he could read them later. He was in a hurry to finish breakfast now. The letter closed with:

Jean Waring came out to spend the day with me on Saturday. Things have been going badly with them, and Jean speaks of getting a place at the library. She sends her love and reminds you that you have owed her a letter for some time.

Oceans of love,
MOTHER.

Hugh frowned slightly as he stuffed the letter into his pocket and turned to his grapefruit.

Aunt Evelyn, with her puffy cheeks and her too-bright eyes, was saying in her rich voice:

"Letter from home, Hughie darling? Mother well?"

"Everything seems to be going fine, thanks, Aunt Evelyn," he answered without looking up from his grapefruit. When he did look up, he met Uncle Bert's eyes for a moment. Quickly he looked away out of the window at the white-capped harbor.

"My God!" Aunt Evelyn's voice exploded, "it must be hot down there in Dixie. Better thank your stars you're up here in God's own country."

Uncle Bert rustled his paper.

"Going sailing?" he asked Hugh. "Pretty rough, son."

"He's going with Peggy Sanford," Aunt Evelyn

giggled, "and it's never rough weather when good fellows get together. Oh, she's daffy about you, darling. And her father is only worth about seven or eight million."

"It isn't enough," Hugh smiled.

He felt a quick unaccountable pang somewhere deep inside.

◈ ◈ ◈

Toward the latter part of the summer incredible, exciting things began to happen in Europe, and Charleston forgot itself in gaping at fantastic headlines in *The News & Courier*. Local affairs assumed a secondary interest; the scandals and gossips about neighbors at home gave place to the atrocities of the Huns in Belgium, and those who had experienced at first hand the march of Sherman found themselves basking again in the light of popular attention. The Three Fates lost all trace of Malvern in the Battle of the Marne and never once thought again of the house on the Ashley until they had recovered from the Battle of Ypres. Then as the Western Front settled down for the winter and the first flush of novelty wore off this ghastly but fascinating new game, the sisters remembered the Sheldons. Hugh, they learned, was coming home for the first St. Cecilia of the season.

Maude Cranston gave herself a final squint in the round, dim mirror over the mantel, put three pieces of coal in the grate, and left her parlor, closing the door carefully behind her to keep the room warm. The smudged white hall was clammy cold. She went to the door on tiptoe to prevent the gorilla from knowing that she was going out. The gorilla, her mistress

knew, had no hesitancy about coming upstairs when the opportunity presented itself and playing the gramophone. "Little Nell," a xylophone record, was her favorite; "dat skippety t'ing," she called it, although her devotion had worn out of it almost all nuance of sound.

As Maude walked along the veranda to the steps and paused to put on her rubbers and open her umbrella, she was aware that the gorilla's shrill singing in the kitchen had ceased. She resisted a temptation to go back; she had no time for altercations. With a grim little smile she turned south on King Street and east at the Battery. Beyond the dripping trees of White Point Gardens lay the leaden harbor beneath a gray mist of rain. Maude turned up Meeting Street and mounted the steps to the great brass lion's-head knocker on the Sausser door. It was Motes that answered her summons, grinned—"How do, Miss Maude," and started up the carpeted stairs with her card.

"Tell them," she called after him in a hoarse whisper, "that it's very important."

After what seemed like a considerable time, Motes came back with the message that the ladies would be down directly. Maude took off her hat, coat, and rubbers and went into the drawing-room. There she drew up a chair to the wood fire and sat in a twitch of impatience, washing her hands and tapping the toes of her shabby shoes on the tiger-skin hearth-rug.

The Three Fates came into the room in triangular formation: Julia ahead, Emily behind with Rosa. The preliminaries were of the most meager description; the sisters sat back with their hands folded in their laps and waited for their caller to justify her presumption

"Of course," Maude began, "you knew that Hugh was coming home for the St. Cecilia."

The Fates knew, of course.

"Have you heard about his love affair?" Maude asked them.

They shook their heads.

"Well," Maude went on, warming to her theme, "you remember I told you last summer about his meeting a girl in Bar Harbor. Worth millions."

The Fates nodded.

"Peggy Sanford was her name, I believe," Miss Julia put in.

"Yes," Maude said and smacked her lips. "Well, do you know"—instinctively she sat forward in her chair and lowered her voice—"Hugh left here the day after Christmas and spent the last week of his holidays at his Uncle Bert's suite in the Plaza Hotel, New York City, and this Sanford girl was in New York, too, chaperoned by Evelyn, and Hugh and the girl were together morning, noon, and night. And do you know I don't believe Sarah Sheldon knows a thing about it."

Maude paused to see what effect her words were having. She was well pleased at what she saw.

"Emmy," Julia said to her sister, "ring for tea."

"Rosa," Emily signaled to the youngest sister, who pulled a bellcord in the corner of the room and hurried, almost scurried back to her seat.

"Some one," Julia said to Maude, "has got to tell Sarah Sheldon."

"Don't tell her I told you," Maude cautioned, "because Evelyn makes me swear I won't tell a soul whenever she writes me anything in a letter. But isn't it pathetic when you stop to think of it? There's poor

dear Cousin Sarah worked herself half dead to save the old place and make enough to put Hugh through medical college, and now he turns round and makes up to some Yankee behind his mother's back. The girl *may* be all right—I don't say she isn't; but the chances are a hundred to one that she's the very type his mother would rather see him dead than married to. And there's Sarah Sheldon made an old woman of herself slaving for him and doesn't even know about this girl. Poor Sarah—gray-headed and with a thousand wrinkles in her face. And she won't admit it, but you can't tell me she hasn't got malaria and had it for years, too."

Maude paused for breath. Tea came in and was rapidly poured and passed.

"Now," Maude resumed, "you all know as well as I do that it's going to kill Sarah when she finds out about that girl. Sarah isn't the kind to be impressed by money, least of all Yankee money."

"Sarah Sheldon," Julia interrupted, "wants that boy of hers to make a name for himself in medicine, to marry a girl of his own sort, and make Malvern his headquarters. She's set her heart on that threefold ambition for him, and I've always feared that one or more of her hopes would be dashed. She's expected too much, far too much. She has made herself triply vulnerable to disaster, and now we shall see."

"Yes," Rosa contributed.

"Sarah Sheldon," Julia added, "wishes Hugh to marry Jean Waring."

"No doubt about that," Emily said.

"Of course she does," Maude agreed. "Of course she does. But what good is wishing going to do her?"

Do you know that despite all the time Hugh's known Jean—and they were children together—and despite the fact that he's engaged to her—"

"Oh, are they really engaged?" Emily asked.

"Well, there's no ring," Maude told her, "but after all till he met this Sanford girl last summer, he hadn't ever looked more than once at any girl but Jean. All I can say is, if he isn't engaged he should be. And yet, as I started to say, do you know when he was home at Christmas time, he only saw Jean once, and that was only for about half an hour one day when he called on her at the library. And she, poor child, saving her pennies for her trousseau."

"Think of that!" Rosa commented when she was looked at.

"The boy's lost his head," Julia snapped.

"Just like his father," Emily sighed. "The Sheldon men have always been fickle. Hugh must be taking special lessons from his Uncle Bert. Bert Cranston is the same as a Sheldon, and if he didn't cause Charlotte to die of a broken heart, then my name isn't Emily Sausser."

"If Hugh keeps on," Maude said with slow emphasis, "he'll break Jean's heart and his mother's, too, just as sure as we're sitting here. Mark my words."

"Some one," Julia announced, "has got to tell Sarah Sheldon about this Yankee girl."

Emily and Rosa were in vigorous agreement.

"And I think, Maude," Julia continued, "that is your proper office."

It was futile for Maude to protest. She was delegated to go out to Malvern the following day if the weather was fair and put Sarah straight on the subject

of the Sanford girl. She was rewarded, upon her departure from the presence of the Fates, with a bundle containing two discarded dresses, one discarded petticoat, a discarded hat, and three pairs of discarded shoes.

The following day was fair, and Maude went to the country. But she brought back a flat and colorless report. Sarah had thanked her pleasantly and without emotion for her information. The vital subject had forthwith been dropped, and the conversation had drifted into impersonal and banal side-streams. It was all very unsatisfactory.

◈ ◈ ◈

When Hugh Sheldon skipped classes and came home to escort his mother and Jean Waring to his first St. Cecilia ball, the Fates, ensconced in their traditional position at one of the fireplaces of the great old hall of the Society, watched with the keenest relish the movements of the mother, the son, and the girl as they moved from group to group in the thronged room. Presently the trio reached the fireside, and Emily and Rosa engaged the attention of Sarah and Jean, while Julia confronted Hugh.

"Welcome to your proper sphere and birthright, young man," she greeted him with a gracious grimace and gave him her hand. "And how do you find things at the North?"

"Splendid, thank you, Miss Julia," Hugh replied with a very low bow and groped for the morsel of repartee that he knew would be expected of him on this occasion. "That is, if one can speak of anything at the North as splendid."

"It is perhaps wise," she said, giving him the sug-

gestion of a smile, "to reserve superlatives for superlative things. Still, I'm told that Yankee girls have much to recommend them—beauty, muscle, wealth. Is that true?"

"My experience there," Hugh flushed, "has been so limited that I'm afraid I can't speak with any authority."

"Rumors, then," Miss Julia went on as she waved to a friend, "are not to be trusted. It might be well to remember that we err in wandering far afield in search of the rose that blooms at our door."

"I would never have wandered," Hugh replied with a smile that he knew must look at least a little wry, "had I dared entertain any hope for your favors, Miss Julia."

Miss Julia tapped him on the cheek with her ivory fan.

"A pretty speech, Mr. Sheldon. I'm glad to see that the North has not rusted your Southern gallantry. But I'm forced to conclude that your manners have not fared so well, since you never come to call on me. You'd do well not to neglect your antique friend; she might be able to give you some sound and badly needed advice. She might remind you, for instance, that money casts a false glamor over its world, that it creates an illusion that is frequently confused with the illusion of love. She might remind you that in youth it is astonishingly simple to mistake the part for the whole and lose track of one's obligations and privileges —as well as the eternal functioning of cause and effect. There's the music. Run along. I daresay you've had quite enough of Miss Julia's sharp tongue. If I had supposed that you would ever take the trouble to call

on me, I would have taken pains to be more subtle this evening. Good-by, young man, and remember that Charleston expects much of her sons."

When Hugh had moved on with his mother and Jean, Miss Julia nudged her sister Emily.

"Sarah has on her wedding-dress," she whispered, "made over."

"I know it," Emily answered behind her fan. "How was Hugh?"

"I put some bees in his bonnet. He's a handsome young fool. He'll break Jean's heart and his mother's sure as sin. I want you to look at Sarah's radiant expression. This is the happiest moment of her life—her boy's a man. So far, so good, but watch and wait."

Other eyes and thoughts were on the Sheldons, mother and son. Charleston was paying a tribute to the woman whose struggle they had watched so long that it had somehow become their own.

◈ VIII ◈

AT the opening of the year 1917, Malvern lay fallow and resting after a long struggle. Under the resolute, tense drive of its mistress the plantation had been made to recall for almost a decade the fecundity of its youth; but now this rejuvenation was past, and the old house looked dreamingly out over the abandoned rice-fields and the wide-curving river, out to the eastern horizon, where the future lay hidden in the peaceful azure. The invisible storm of war that was raging beyond that deceptive horizon was beginning to send a light backwash to this remote river country, sucking away all but a fragment of the plantation's labor. Fabulous wages beckoned to those who were venturesome enough to break the ancient bondage of the soil, and where the venturesome few led the timid many followed. The rice-fields were yielding to the marshes, whose kingdom they had usurped; there were no hands to plant the upland cotton and corn, and the fields were golden with broom-straw. A mere scattering of people was left in the Quarter, barely enough to do the work around the house and keep the grounds up.

Sarah Sheldon's mind was at ease as far as money was concerned. The funds for this last year of Hugh's course at Johns Hopkins were safe in the Charleston bank, and there was a margin for emergencies. The road was clear at last; and the end of that road—the beginning of Hugh's career—was just ahead.

There was one great worry that kept twisting Sarah's heart, and that was the plight of Jean Waring. Every Sunday and every holiday that the library was closed the girl came out to Malvern to renew the only contacts she had with Hugh—his home and his mother; and the mother, knowing the deep hurt that lay behind the brave eyes and the cheerful mouth, sent every balm in her power toward that hidden ache that was also her own. She read aloud Hugh's brief, hurried weekly letters, lingering over each word to wring from it all possible meaning, and adding at the close a message to Jean when—as frequently—it was not there. Whenever a bundle of socks and odds-and-ends of clothing came home for darning and mending, the older woman shared with the younger this intimate labor of love. Jean was forever sewing on something for Hugh: curtains for his room, a bureau cover, and always handkerchiefs to go into the boxes that his mother sent off. Sometimes, when the weather was fine, they rode or walked together. Wherever they were and whatever they were doing, Hugh was always with them.

How was this going to end, Sarah worried. Here in this matter of Jean was a final problem in her hopes and plans for Hugh. Perhaps she had been wrong in trusting him to find his way in that Northern world to which his uncle had introduced him. No, that was the test of the years of molding she had given him; if he failed now, it would be because she had failed then to imbue him with the fundamentals of character. At this time there was nothing that she could do but pray and have faith.

Late in March a telegram came from Hugh saying

that he would be able to get off to come home for two or three days. It was not until Sarah had driven to the station to meet him and had perceived the significance in the first eager question he had asked when he had kissed her that she realized her prayers and her faith were at last being answered.

"Have you both been all right?" he had asked.

And now as they drove back the River Road, he was saying:

"I stopped in at the library to see Jean, but I couldn't get to talk with her on account of the people. Particularly Miss Heywood, who always hovers around like a buzzard or something. I'm sorry, Mother, but you know she is snoopy. And I wanted very much to talk with Jean."

"You'll see her to-morrow, dear," Sarah said.

"She said she'd be out on the early train. But I did want to see her to-day. . . . Mother, listen, I've got something to tell you. I don't quite know where to start. Well, you see, I never told you anything about it . . . guess I was ashamed or rather thought you wouldn't approve . . . but there was a girl at the North that I thought I loved better than Jean. I was wrong. It took me a long time to find it out. I'm not proud about that part—just never did stop to think it out till lately. Then I knew it couldn't be anybody but Jean. . . . This other girl, well, she wasn't one of our kind. Her whole background was different. She wouldn't have understood our traditions and all that. . . . When I saw the whole thing clearly, I just had to come down to see Jean. Do you think she'll have me? Do you think she'll wait for me?"

"I think she will, dear," his mother told him.

The next morning when Jean came out from town Sarah Sheldon sent her off with Hugh for a ride. They turned up the River Road toward Summerville and when conversation gave out rode hard to fill the painful vacuum. Twice they stopped to rest their horses, but on neither occasion was Hugh able to bring out the subject that was on the tip of his tongue.

When they had returned to Malvern and had left their horses in the stable, they strolled through the gardens toward the house, each concealing behind banter and mirth what was in their hearts. Spring was early this year. Frequent rains and suns warm as summer had brought the earth to convulsed life. Flowers that ordinarily bloomed weeks apart had come out together: in the long beds iris and tulip and first rose thrust their colors against those of jonquil and hyacinth; on the lawns the camellia bushes were overtaken by the azaleas. The trees had put on cloaks of delicate green almost over night, and the great lavender torrents of wistaria were half veiled in their own leaves. To Hugh and Jean as they walked along tinted azalea aisles the soft spring breeze brought the mingled fragrance of all the flowers. They found that their hands were clasped, and at the rose garden they turned off the path that led to the house and went down the terrace to the lower lawn. They sat down under a live-oak with their faces to the river. Overhead the silver pennants of moss stirred gently in the sunlight. As they watched the white petals of the summer-house Cherokee rose flicker down onto the dark waters of the butterfly lakes, a silence came between them that neither had the power to break.

At last Jean got to her feet.

"Hugh," she said, "your mother will be wondering where we are. It means so much to her to have you home. And besides, it must be time for dinner."

He looked up at her in sudden dismay.

"Wait, Jean,—don't go yet."

"But your mother's going to have early lunch so that I can get the train back to town."

"You're not going this afternoon? Why, Jean, I was counting on your staying over night. I thought we'd all go in to church in the morning."

"I'm afraid I can't do that. Your mother doesn't want people hanging around when you're home."

Hugh took her hand and drew her down beside him. Now all at once it was very easy to talk; the words came pouring out of their own accord.

"Jean dear, listen to me. You and I have never talked seriously in our lives. We've known each other so long that we've just left things unsaid, understood. Now can you be very serious for a minute or two?"

She met his eyes squarely and nodded. Her mouth looked very set and unyielding.

"In a year," he hurried on, "I'll be in practice. It won't be long before I'll be getting on. Will you wait for me?"

She was looking off across the river now. Her voice came from far away as if she were standing over there.

"I didn't think you cared about me. I thought you'd forgotten."

"Jean, forgive me if I seemed to have forgotten. I never had really. I've just been mixed up and sort of lost. Jean, you will wait, won't you? Don't you see, we all belong together—Malvern and Mother and you and I. We're all one. Don't you feel that way?"

She looked at him with a quick smile. The smil
came toward him, but the lips that met his were ver
unsteady, and damp eyelashes touched his cheek.

◈ ◈ ◈

The tide of Sarah Sheldon's happiness was at th
full. To her it seemed that life had made abundan
amends for former treacheries, and she was prepare
now in these latter years to give it again the confidenc
she had given it in youth. Time had robbed her o
many things (where now was the girl who had ma
ried Ned Sheldon in St. Michael's on that long ag
spring day?), had marked her hair with the fros
of many winters, wrinkled and faded the bright clot
of her youth, but in return for her losses had bestowe
upon her at last the gift of perfect happiness and th
capacity to appreciate that gift to the full.

The days that followed Hugh's brief visit hom
passed over Malvern like soaring birds. Jean wa
transfigured. Almost every night she came out t
stay with Sarah and talked so late that she had to b
put to bed. The somber tie of hope that had boun
the two women before was now joyful fellowship i
a dream coming true. They were free to plan for th
future. There were a hundred matters to decide, an
while they decided and redecided, they sewed—Jea
with the eager happiness of youth, Sarah with th
quiet happiness of age. One day early in April th
old Sheldon diamond, the stone that Gilbert Sheldo
had given Eliza Sheldon and the only family jew
that had survived Reconstruction hard times, cam
back to Malvern and Jean's finger. Sarah had take

it from the silver-trunk and given it to Hugh to have reset in Baltimore.

April grew strong and shut the river world in with dense screens of foliage that seemed to leave no way of entrance or exit under the serene sky. And then with incredible suddenness and without warning a jagged shadow pierced the brooding, peaceful sunlight of Malvern. Sarah Sheldon was not able at once to realize what had happened. She felt stunned and it was only when a letter came from Hugh that she was able to grasp the full significance of the shadow.

"I know," the heart of the letter said, "that it's the thing Dad would have done and I know it's the thing you'll want me to do. The government is sending notices to the medical schools urging us to stay in our places and let the other fellow do it, but as soon as I get my diploma, I want to enlist. I've written Jean. I know beforehand that you'll both be helpful about it."

Sarah carried the words with her for a day and a night before she could trust herself to answer. Cruel, sometimes fantastically cruel things happened to people, had in the past happened to her, but it was hard to believe in this threat that was so malevolently timed to the hour of her greatest happiness, her deepest tranquillity, when she had laid aside her vigilance and her armor. Life had made a surprise attack in the midst of a truce and had found her unprepared. The war—it had been little more than a matter of massed puppets moving over a great map country on which lines alternately swelled and sagged. Now in a flash this spectacle, remote and unreal, was come to mon-

strous life just beyond the spring-green trees th
fringed the opposite bank of the river. Legions
flesh-and-blood men—sons and brothers—advance
endlessly across scarred fields, withered before ro
of fire-spitting rifles, sank down dying with lips parte
for their last words and eyes staring for their la
images of earth. Mighty guns shook the marshes ar
tore the lawns and gardens to shreds; in the sky a
planes swooped and climbed and fell flaming. Th
mother blamed herself for not having seen until no
the vast agony through which so many hearts we
passing, for not having perceived the menace to he
self that lurked in this carnage of others. Into th
maelstrom Hugh was being drawn. Why? . . . Pa
ing the garden that day and lying awake that nig
Sarah repeated over and over the platitudes with whic
the human heart mitigates bitter realities. But th
was not enough. What fierce, blind forces were pitte
against her, what pitiless antagonist had cunningly d
vised this vital thrust? Hugh was the realization
all her dreams; for him she had fought a long, lone
fight. She had paid life well; she had earned pea
now at the end. But here was life threatening h
again. If anything happened to Hugh, if such we
God's will, how could she ever sustain her faith?

The next morning she sat down at the old secreta
in the living-room to answer Hugh's letter, but th
room and the house seemed choked and stifling fe
all the open windows, and she took her writing o
to the bench under one of the trees on the lawn. Th
pen was stubborn and slow, but it managed to te
Hugh at last that his mother was naturally upset

the thought of his enlisting but that she was proud to have a son who showed his blood by responding without hesitation to the call of Duty and Honor.

◈ ◈ ◈

Spring became summer. Hugh's graduation went by, and after that there were a few short days at Malvern with his mother and Jean. Then came the long space of camp with only the poor, flimsy contact of letters.

Late autumn brought Hugh home for the leave that marked the eve of his sailing. There were three golden days, and then the last night could no longer be put off. While Hugh, flushed in his shoulder straps and boots, was in town with Jean saying last minute good-by's, Sarah lost herself in the opiate of dinner preparations. Old damask and crested silver and china came down from an upstairs closet; the lock-room in the cellar was made to yield the last of its wines. Motes had been returned to Malvern for the occasion by the Three Fates, and the rustic kitchen help were awed into unaccustomed silence by their city relative's high manners and might have been frozen into uselessness had it not been for Maum Molly. The old woman had had herself carried to the house in her chair and kept things stirring with her continuous toothless grumbling. She knew the dazed suffering that lay behind Sarah Sheldon's bustling and she took over the actual supervision of the kitchen, basting the ham and turkey herself. Time had taught her the killing pain of a mother's farewell to her son; more than once had she herself said good-

by to sons and grandsons going off down the river. But she avoided addressing any form of sympathy to her mistress.

"When de tide yonder come up," she said to Motes afterwards, "speeches ain' gwine sen' um back. When an ol' 'oman's heart is full, 'e jes' like de tide."

When Hugh and Jean came back from town late in the afternoon, they found Sarah Sheldon waiting for them before a bright fire in the living-room. She wore the dress that Jean had helped her make over from an old evening gown, and her hair was arranged in a way that reminded Hugh of the mother of his boyhood. She took him into one arm and Jean into the other. . . . In the dining-room the candles burned palely in the flashing light from the fireplace.

After dinner Motes served coffee in the living-room with all the old ceremony. Hugh, sitting between his mother and Jean, on the sofa, kept up the lively string of camp anecdotes that he had begun at the table; but when this subterfuge failed, there was only the low song of the flames between the three and the silence they dreaded. Sarah left Hugh to Jean and went to the piano. In the shadows of the corner of the room it was not necessary to conceal so tensely the ache that was tightening on her throat like a hand. She could watch with eyes unveiled the pair on the sofa, and to Hugh she could say her farewell in a language nearer the heart than words. She began with the melodies, the waltzes and the one-steps, that were Hugh's recent favorites; but from these she moved back to the preludes and nocturnes that had carried her through the long years of loneliness and despair. At last she played the old songs that belonged

to Hugh's young boyhood, the songs that went with joyous moods and the songs that soothed in times of weariness or sickness.

Hugh's head rested on the back of the sofa. His eyes were closed and his lips were smiling.

"Mother," his voice came to her, "sing that crazy little old thing we used to call the boat song—'Romance,' Aunt Lottie used to call it. You know the one I used to love so much."

She caught her breath and felt numbly for the keys, not knowing whether she could trust her voice. But the words came with the music, soft and low without faltering. . . . When she had finished, she sat for a moment with her hands pressed in her lap and her eyes shut tight. Then when she had steadied herself, she went back from the piano to the firelight.

"Now, my dears," she smiled, kissing Jean and then Hugh, "I'll say good-night. I feel the least bit tired, and I think to-morrow will be easier if I'm rested. Just remember that we have to take the early train in to town and don't stay up too long. No, dear, don't come. I'll leave a lamp in the upper hall for you."

She was gone, leaving them alone to exchange the bitter-sweets of lovers on the eve of parting. Later, when Hugh had left Jean at the door of her room off the old drawing-room upstairs and had gone to his own room, he found that sleep was hopelessly beyond his grasp. His mind, caught in a whirl of thoughts, refused to rest. Vague, heavy misery gripped his limbs, and the harder he struggled for forgetfulness the more wide-awake he became. Finally he gave up, dressed, and tiptoed downstairs. In the living-room, where he stirred the fire and sat down with a ciga-

rette, the same sensation of oppression seized him, but now with such force that it was as if the walls were closing in on him. For an instant he had a vivid illusion that the house was somehow alive, that it sighed deeply like some living thing in pain, that it breathed a great nameless sorrow around and through him. His senses were in an increasing turmoil. He had a feeling that many people were moving about him, touching him with tingling invisible fingers, seeking his eyes and yet evading them. Some of the faces he knew as well as his own; others he recognized dimly. All were familiar in some mysterious way. They kept pressing round him, and over the hush of the room hung the confusion of their voices.

With a shudder Hugh hurried into the hall and unbolted the river door. He half expected to find a high wind lashing the trees; instead a pale, quiet moon looked down on the sleeping gardens and sent a silver glimmer over the river. He went down the steps and along the walk that led to the edge of the terrace. Here he paced with his face now to the house now to the river, until the fresh, cold air had revived him and swept away the feeling of suffocation that had possessed him.

His thoughts began to leap up like flames from a replenished fire. A great exaltation lifted him and swung him up toward the stars. . . . From far away in the night came the cry of a train. It had always moved him, that cry, as long ago as he could remember. To-night it was a long, profound call that stirred him to the depths of his being, and he felt his heart calling out in answer to it. To-night in a flash he fathomed its nature and its meaning: it was the voice

of the world, of life, of time. All things were there —all forms and colors, all hopes and fears, pleasure and pain, all the infinite variety of the past and of the future, all light and all darkness, all memory and all oblivion were somehow blended in that faraway call. It was the voice of life that he was listening to in this hour of heightened consciousness.

His eyes were fixed on the house now. By the rare magic of moment and mood it seemed to him that the voice came from there, that the beloved old house, dreamlike under the moon, was speaking to him its ultimate secrets, disclosing at this time of his leave-taking its heart and soul, the final truth of its nature. This Malvern, this world in which he lived, had presented itself in many illusory aspects. In the beginning it had been a place of simple myths and the comforting faith which his mother had given him and to which she still clung, a place where Good was known at once from Evil and all the heartbreaking bafflements of life and death were answered in a single word. Later, at school and college, when he had taken in his first draughts of science, this world and all its wonders had become a vast, clashing machine set in motion by a cosmic maniac. After a time his mind had made order in this chaos, and he had come to believe that though there could be no God in the old conceptions, man at least would struggle slowly, slowly upward toward the stars—the world would become a heaven. Malvern, the Malvern of the future, would be a place of unbroken happiness. But was that truly the goal? To-night he perceived that such a Malvern was meaningless, as meaningless and stagnant as a river in which no current flowed and

no tides. What, then, was the secret meaning of th house that the voice of the night was crying out t him? At last he understood. The house, the worl was simply a place of great and strange adventure Its spirit was that and nothing else. And that wa enough. . . . A set of values to live by? To live i was necessary to have some set of values; one coul not have them all; one half chose, half accepted. Hi were this house, his mother, Jean, and a profes sion that would help his fellows. That, too, wa enough. . . .

He became conscious of the cold breath of the rive and shivered, feeling that he had been pacing the wall for hours. The light in his mother's room and th one in Jean's had long since vanished, and the hous stood waiting for him in the somber light. He wa aware now that he had watched those lights blink ou and heard the windows opening without comprehen sion, his thoughts bewitched by vain abstractions. Th two he loved were there and for the last time, per haps; nostalgia seized him and a sudden feeling o cold so intense that it seemed to penetrate to his heart He hurried back into the house, bolted the door, an climbed the stairs. At first he started to cross th darkness of the drawing-room to Jean's door; but in stead he turned to his mother's room and knocke softly at the door. Her voice answered him at once and he pushed open the door.

"Did I wake you up?" he asked her as he knelt by the bed and rested his head in the circle of her arms

"I haven't been asleep, dear. I'm afraid I shouldn' have taken coffee."

He took a long breath.

After a moment he whispered:

"We understand everything, don't we?"

Her arms answered him.

"Mother," he went on, "I'm coming back. Don't worry about that. I'm coming back."

"I know you are," she told him.

The feeling of tense misery fell away from him, and his consciousness began to drift on little eddies of oblivion. Through the open window from somewhere far off in the starry night came the voice of a train, very faint and tenuous like the music of a dream.

EPILOGUE—SPRING, 1930

THE car, speeding along the sun-dappled road, came presently to a Georgian gateway, turned in, and purred through a long avenue of live-oaks and magnolias. At the end of the avenue the old house stood revealed, and the car circled the weed-grown drive to the paintless portico, where another car was parked.

"Is this Mr. Marvin?" Mrs. Nichols smiled, holding her white-gloved hand out to the handsome young man who came bowing toward her.

It was Mr. Marvin, and there was a prelude of introductory pleasantries before the business of the day was taken up.

"I'd like to show you the grounds," Mr. Marvin said, "before we look at the house. Mrs. Sheldon has asked us to come in for tea at four, and we can discuss matters then."

He led the Nichols around to the river side of the house and showed them over the lawns and gardens, pointing out this and explaining that. Mrs. Nichols plied him with a thousand random questions, mostly historical; the curiosity of the rest of the family was confined to deer and duck hunting, bridle paths, stables, and a site for a polo field.

They arrived at length at that part of the gardens

where the brick-walled graveyard stood half lost in masses of shrubs and trees. Mrs. Nichols herself pushed open the iron gate and led the way in. She was simply fascinated. What a spot, she was thinking, to show visitors! When the high stone vault of Gilbert Sheldon had been exclaimed over and the flat stone pieces of several of the other graves deciphered with the aid of Mr. Marvin, she came to one quite new inscription that held her eye.

"Captain Hugh Blakesley Sheldon," she read. "Died December Twenty Third, Nineteen Eighteen. Mr. Marvin, who was this?"

Mr. Marvin cleared his throat; he was getting a little husky from answering so many questions.

"Hugh Sheldon," he explained, "was the present Mrs. Sheldon's son. I remember him at the Academy —he was two forms ahead of me. He fought through the war, was wounded twice, and decorated. After the Armistice he started for home, and his mother and a Charleston girl to whom he was engaged went to New York to meet him. When the transport docked, they were told that he had died of flu on the way. Afterwards, the last letters that he had written in France kept coming."

The Nichols family murmured expressions of pity.

"Was he an only child?" Mrs. Nichols asked.

"Yes, ma'm," Mr. Marvin nodded.

"The last of the line," Mrs. Nichols whispered to the grave.

"There's still the lady we're to have tea with," Mr. Marvin said. He consulted his watch. "I think she'll be expecting us now."

Mr. Marvin conducted his party back to the house

and up the worn marble steps to the river door. A knock brought to the door a young mulatto girl in an apron and cap, stiffly starched and much too large for her, who ushered them through the cool hall into the living-room. The room was sparsely furnished with a dropleaf table and several antique chairs, an old piano, and what appeared to be a Duncan Phyfe sofa covered with a worn spread; in the panel over the mantel, Mrs. Nichols discovered with delight, was an oil painting of a lady in the dress of the Revolutionary period, who seemed to be smiling at herself in the tall gilt mirror that hung opposite her in the space between the windows. Mr. Marvin was pointing out the carved cornices which were almost intact. Mrs. Nichols was on the point of questioning him regarding the portrait of the lady when the door to the hall opened and her hostess came in.

While Mr. Marvin performed the introductions, Mrs. Nichols's bright and practiced eyes studied Mrs. Sheldon with interest. She had been prepared to view with pity this last of the Sheldons, but now she found herself experiencing quite another emotion,—admiration. The woman was very frail and deeply wrinkled and her hair was pure white, but she carried herself very erect and her eyes although kind were entirely sure of themselves. She was dressed in a coat, skirt, and high net collar that belonged to the styles of a dozen years before, yet she showed no trace of self-consciousness. Her appearance and bearing, Mrs. Nichols decided, was proud in the manner of genuine aristocracy.

"It was so good of you to come to see me," Mrs. Sheldon was saying. "Let me show you my house, won't you?"

When the house had been shown from attic to basement, Mrs. Sheldon brought her guests back to the living-room and poured them tea, while the mulatto girl passed cakes in Sheffield baskets. Mrs. Nichols wondered if it was going to be possible to get the tea service and some of the other things with the house. It was all such a delicate situation to handle gracefully, and Mr. Marvin was of no help at all. When she had had her second cup of tea and no progress had been made, Mrs. Nichols saw the need of taking the initiative, for Frank and Jack were beginning to show signs of restlessness.

"Mrs. Sheldon," she began, feeling a strange hotness come over her face, "my husband and I are very much interested in acquiring an estate such as Malvern Barony. When we first made inquiries in January, we learned from Mr. Marvin that you might consider selling this place, but we feared the price—considering the repairs that would have to be made, the putting in of bathrooms and electricity—would be more than we felt we could invest at this time. However, we find that your price is much lower than we had anticipated. Mr. Nichols and I both feel that seventy-five thousand would be a fairer price than fifty thousand."

Mrs. Nichols paused with a quick little intake of breath. This was really very trying, this part. She hoped Mrs. Sheldon was not going to break down. The old lady seemed all right, except for her hands, clasped so tightly that they were white. Her voice came very steady from between lips that smiled gently:

"That's very kind of you and your husband, Mrs. Nichols. But it is not primarily a matter of money.

What is of such importance to me is to be able to pass Malvern over to people who will live in it, protect it, and love it. It is a sensitive old house, full of years and memories. It deserves, I think, a little more tenderness than most houses. You will use it well?"

"I can assure you of that," Mrs. Nichols said earnestly.

"I am sure you will. Perhaps you can understand what peace that knowledge gives me. It has been my great anxiety what was to become of Malvern."

"I understand," Mrs. Nichols said in a voice full of sympathy. After a pause she added: "If we can be of assistance to you at any time in any way, please let us know."

Mrs. Sheldon expressed her gratitude.

"I have but one request to make," she said, "and that is that you allow me to provide for the maintenance of the family burial-ground in the far garden."

Mrs. Nichols glanced in the direction of her husband, who nodded.

"Of course, Mrs. Sheldon," she said.

When, later, the Nichols and Mr. Marvin came down the front steps after taking leave of Mrs. Sheldon, Connie burst out with: "Wasn't she the most marvelous old freak!" But a moment later she said in a lower voice to Mr. Marvin: "I'm sorry. I forgot you were part of all this. You see, I've always wanted to see a Charleston freak. But you don't look like one."

"I reckon I am—underneath," he laughed and flushed. "We've been living in the past here—more than was good for us. The younger crowd has been getting away from all that since the war, though.

We're just about like any other town now. Th freaks are dying out fast. Wouldn't you like to s what the new Charleston is like? We're all goin over to Folly Beach. I can promise you somethin good to drink—if that's any encouragement."

"Lots. Providing it isn't corn. Excuse me, but can't go that beastly white mule. You have no ide how I admire you all for being able to guzzle it th way you do."

"To-night we have real gin and scotch—right out o the sea."

"Sounds like a rare airing."

"Won't your brother come too?"

Connie turned to speak to Jack, but he and he mother and father were walking off toward the ca

"He'll come," she said. "If I can get him excite He's so rotten spoiled."

"I think Jean Waring might excite him. She's ou perennial débutante, and she seems to improve wit age. She's the girl that was engaged to Hug Sheldon."

"Oh, I meant to ask you what became of the gi in that story."

"She went to pieces about Hugh. Then for a lon time she supervised children's welfare work. All o a sudden she changed—nobody seems to know wha did it—and now she supervises parties. You'll lik her. Every one likes her, except the prudes."

"Have you got a boy friend or something for me?"

"Could I possibly qualify?"

"You Southerners are so quick. You see, the reaso I asked, in Aiken there are never enough men to g round."

"The Navy prevents it from being like that here."

"How attractive. Look here, you Charleston people like horses the way we do, don't you?"

"Not quite so expensively."

"You're *so* quick—how am I going to keep up with you?"

They stood at the foot of the steps smiling at each other. Mrs. Nichols was calling musically from the car. When they came over, she said:

"We'll see you at nine in the morning to sign the papers, then, Mr. Marvin."

Mr. Marvin bowed and smiled.

"Young man," Mr. Nichols said as he stepped on the starter, "where can I get to a ticker in the morning?"

"There's a market board next door to my office on Broad Street, sir. Miss Nichols, will seven be too early for you this evening?"

"My name's Connie," she smiled. "Seven's a nice hour. We're camping at the Villa Something—you know."

She waved good-by, and the car started off and circled smoothly around to the avenue.

"You're to come too, monkey," she told her brother. "We're going for an airing with Charleston's flaming youths and maidens."

Mrs. Nichols smiled to herself. Young people became acquainted so easily these days. It would be a splendid idea to develop contacts with a few Charleston people; they would make excellent background for her revival of the old, charming, aristocratic way of living. She had forgotten to ask Mrs. Sheldon about the plantation negroes. There should be a mammy

and a butler, footmen, grooms, maids, cooks, and so on. They were a very vital part of the picture. Then she remembered something else:

"Frank dear, we'll reach town in time to see St. Michael's and St. Philip's and drive round the Battery before dark."

"If you don't mind," Frank tossed over his shoulder, "what I want to see more than anything else when we get to town is a shower and a pitcher of ice."

"Very well, dear. We can look around Tradd and Church Street to-night. The old town is particularly charming at night."

"I'm terribly sorry, darling, but I'd appreciate a nice early movie to-night and bed. Save all that sightseeing for some other time."

Mrs. Nichols buried her chagrin under a rippling laugh.

"Very well, dear. After all, you must be tired, and there'll be plenty of time to-morrow."

After all, she could afford to laugh. The day had been very, very satisfactory. There was no sense in attempting to coerce your family into doing things they didn't feel like doing. She settled back against the cushion and contented herself with calling Frank's attention to how badly the gate needed repairing as the car turned into the River Road and headed for Charleston.

◈ ◈ ◈

It is Easter morning in Charleston. The radiant soft air is fragrant with the breath of spring gardens and tingles with the reverberations of St. Michael's golden chimes, singing of Resurrection and Eternal Life.

The old lady who sits on a bench in Battery Park listens dreamily to the familiar voice. Rich overtones of memory cling to the lingering rhythms, and the faded ways of days precious beyond words or tears. Her dim eyes, which have been following the movements of the children who are playing on the new grass, look away to the quiet, shining harbor.

Presently the chimes beckon her to come, and she leaves the bench and the park and starts up Meeting Street. But she has not progressed many steps before her path is crossed by the Sausser Sisters, who have appeared on the sidewalk in all their Easter glory and are on the point of entering their victoria. They greet Sarah Sheldon warmly and take her in with them. The few blocks' drive to St. Michael's is congested with a confusion of the tongues of the chimes clashing with the tongues of the Fates, who are pressing upon their companion what tactics must be employed at the next meeting of the Ladies Benevolent Society to suppress a little clique of radicals.

At the vestibule of church, under the thudding chimes, the Fates whisper hurried last words before they pass on in. Half way up the aisle they take leave of Sarah Sheldon, and she goes on to her pew near the front.

One by one, in pairs, in family groups, the communicants of St. Michael's come from the high and low streets of Charleston to occupy ancestral stalls. The organ introduces the processional; and choir and congregation swell the triumphal anthem:

Christ, the Lord, is risen to-day.
Alleluia! . . .

Miss Julia, the Fate nearest the aisle, nudges Miss Emmy, and Miss Emmy passes the signal on to Miss Rosa. It is an emphatic nudge and well it may be, for into the Waring pew ahead are stepping not only Mr. and Mrs. Waring and Brewt Waring but also Mr. and Mrs. Nichols, the Yankees who own Malvern Barony. Nor is that all, the Fates observe with inward gasps, into the Marvin pew across the aisle David Marvin is ushering Constance Nichols, Jack Nichols, and Jean Waring. Glances of the utmost significance pass among the Fates as they sing.

Made like him, like him we rise.
Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies.
Alleluia! . . .

After the service Sarah Sheldon leaves by the side door to avoid being delayed by the usual after-church sociality. She hurries back to her little house on Tradd Street. There she takes the flowers from their vases, wraps them in paper, and puts them into the basket that holds her lunch; then she goes on to the wharf on East Battery where Captain Jenkins will be waiting with his motorboat.

"Captain Jenkins," she smiles as she gives him the basket and takes his hand to be helped down, "you're always on time."

"Yes, ma'm," he grins. He arranges the seat cushions for her and turns to spin the flywheel of the engine. "Well, ma'm, we couldn't have a much prettier day for Easter."

"Isn't it beautiful."

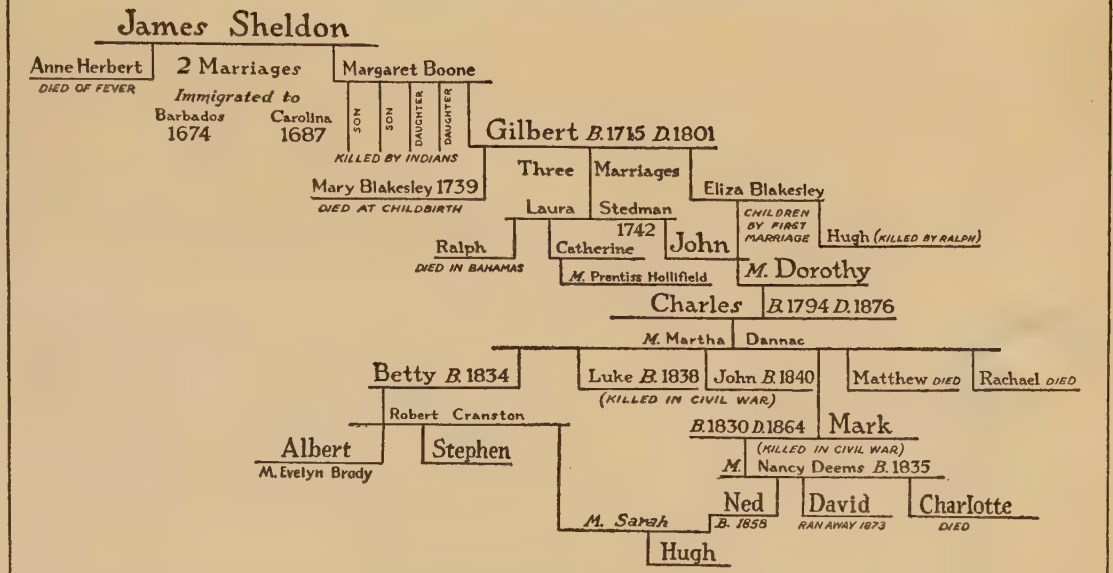
The motor pulses to life, and the boat chugs away

from the wharf and turns her nose up the shining blue Ashley over the dark tides. Sarah gives Jenkins the flowers to put under the seat out of the sun, while she spreads out the lunch that she has prepared largely for him.

When they reach Malvern, Jenkins moors the boat at the old landing; his passenger has directed him not to use the new dock that the Nichols have built. She takes the flowers and walks along the lower terrace path, looking up at the house until the view is cut off and she is in the aisles of the gardens. Farther on, past the cypress pool where massed azaleas tint the somber water, she pushes open the old iron gate and enters the secret graveyard. White clouds of Cherokee rose and dogwood float in the bright green of the renascent trees, and the air is scented with the breath of hidden blossoms. . . . Later her eyes move slowly over the carved stone on Hugh's grave under the moss-draped arms of the great live-oak, and her lips move with the precious words. *This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality; Death is swallowed up in victory.* Her eyes and lips rest on the familiar motto of the Sheldon arms: *Ad Astra Alta*—to the high stars. To the high stars. Death is swallowed up in victory. . . . It seems to her all at once that she hears voices, the voices of Hugh and Jean, talking just beyond the wall. The illusion is so real that for a few piercing seconds her heart stands still. But when she listens, there comes no further sound; only the soft, joyous turmoil of the spring wind in the overhanging branches.

THE END

Sheldon Family Tree



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Griswold
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